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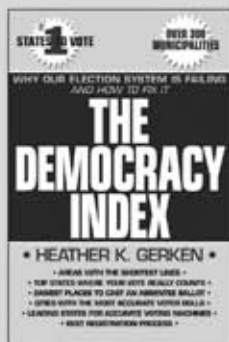
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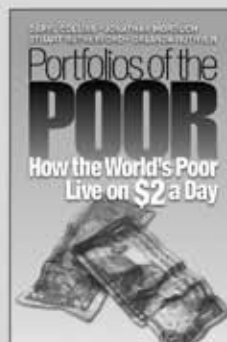
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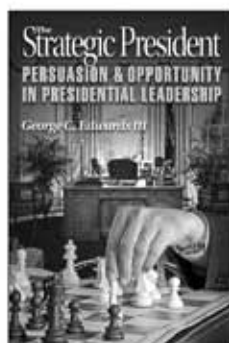
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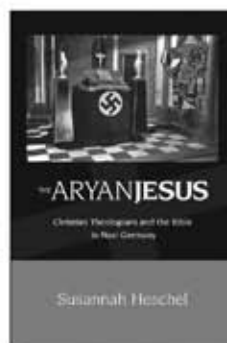
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THE NEW REPUBLIC

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The Runaway

WHEN ARLEN SPECTER went to the White House the day after he announced he was leaving the Republican Party, the occasion had the feel of a wedding ceremony. President Obama pledged Specter his “full commitment,” and Vice President Biden, who rhapsodized about the many hours he’d spent riding Amtrak with the Pennsylvania senator, went even further. “Arlen Specter has been my friend and my confidant and my partner,” Biden said. “It’s just a delight to have no separation.” In a way, the matrimonial overtones were understandable. Specter’s joining the Democratic Party is a political marriage. But it is a marriage of convenience—and the Obama administration must be eternally mindful of that fact if it wants its union with Specter to be a happy one.

Specter, for his part, has no illusions about why he has partnered with the Democrats. “I am not prepared to have my twenty-nine-year record in the United States Senate decided by the Pennsylvania Republican primary electorate—not prepared to have that record decided by that jury,” he candidly explained in the press conference announcing his decision to switch parties. In other words, had Specter not faced certain defeat in next year’s primary, he would still be a member of the GOP. Indeed, at the same press conference, Specter reiterated a number of policy positions that put him in direct conflict with his new party, including opposition to the Employee Free Choice Act and to Obama’s nomination of Dawn Johnsen to head the Justice Department’s Office of Legal Counsel.

But, if Specter is a clear-eyed realist about the nature of this union, Democrats are not. Although Obama and Biden can hardly be faulted for warmly welcoming Specter into the Democratic fold, their actions leave something to be desired—namely their decision to offer Specter their full support in next year’s Democratic Senate primary. Presumably, they hope that Specter, an adaptable politician if there ever was one, will now tack left in order to win over the Pennsylvania liberals who make up a disproportionate share of the Democratic primary electorate. But, with Obama already vowing to campaign and fund-raise for him, it wouldn’t be unreasonable for Specter to assume he can vote in ways that displease Democratic voters (and even the White House) on critical issues like health care

since, at the end of the day, he has the ultimate political trump card: the support of Obama, whose approval rating in Pennsylvania is almost ten points higher than Specter’s.

That is why it’s essential that Specter not run unopposed in the Democratic primary. Right now, prominent Pennsylvania Democrats—most notably Governor Ed Rendell—are working to clear the field for Specter. The politician under the greatest pressure to get out of Specter’s way is Joe Sestak, a Democratic congressman from suburban Philadelphia who had been preparing to run for Specter’s seat. So far, Sestak—who spent 31 years in the Navy, ultimately rising to the rank of vice admiral, before he was elected to the House of Representatives in 2006—has indicated he won’t bow to that pressure and is one of the only elected Democrats to speak critically of Specter since his party switch. But even men who were once three-star admirals have their limit, and it’s

not hard to imagine that, if the pressure continues, Sestak will buckle. So Obama needs to tell Rendell and other Pennsylvania Democrats not to interfere with prospective candidates.

It’s also crucial that, once the primary battle begins, Obama makes sure the intensity of his support for Specter’s candidacy is closely tied to the intensity of Specter’s support for Obama’s agenda. In 2004, Specter relied on George W. Bush’s fervent backing to help him win over enough conservative voters to

eke out a two-point win in the GOP primary. There’s no reason Obama can’t do the same for Specter with liberal voters in the Democratic primary next year. But Specter, of course, had to swing right to secure Bush’s support. There’s no reason Obama shouldn’t make Specter swing left to secure his. It’s one thing for Obama to endorse Specter’s candidacy; it’s another thing for him to record commercials and robo-calls, hold fund-raisers, and show up at campaign events for Specter. He should only do the latter if Specter comes through for him.

Pennsylvania is not a red state in which Democratic politicians are afforded a lot of leeway by the national party so as to make themselves electable. It is a solidly Democratic state—it hasn’t gone for a Republican presidential candidate since 1988—which means that Democrats have the right to expect a Democratic senator from Pennsylvania to vote like a Democrat. One Ben Nelson in the Democratic caucus is enough. If Obama and other Democrats allow Specter to switch his party simply to get reelected without switching his votes, then their marriage with him will be loveless—and they will be trapped in it. ♦



Tortured Logic

Hit me Bybee, one more time.

JONATHAN CHAIT

REMEMBER THE Rule of Law? In the late 1990s, it was all the rage in conservative circles. Having maneuvered Bill Clinton into a position where he could either lie under oath or suffer massive personal and political embarrassment, conservatives reasoned that Clinton must be held accountable for perjury or the basic underpinnings of democracy would be shattered. The Republican sensibility was best reflected by the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page, which not only crusaded for impeachment but demanded, in 2001, that Bill Clinton be indicted even after leaving office. The *Journal* rejected the logic of promoting healing and insisted that a post-presidency indictment would uphold “the principle that even Presidents and ex-Presidents are not above the law.”

Over the last decade, though, the right’s thinking on this question has evolved. Today, the administration malfeasance consists of illegal torture, a crime I’d argue is no less serious than lying under oath about fellatio. Yet Republicans now believe that the Rule of Law is not only consistent with letting administration crimes go unpunished but actually *requires* it. To prosecute the departed administration would make us (to use their new catchphrase) a “banana republic”—the premise being that banana republics are defined not by their use of torture but by their overly zealous enforcement of anti-torture laws.

The GOP line is once again reflected by the *Journal* editorial page, which now thunders against “a new Administration prosecuting its predecessor for policy disagreements.” The editorial notably fails to even address the question of whether the previous administration complied with the law, which is apparently no longer an important element of the Rule of Law.

The right’s newfound outrage is a more hysterical manifestation of the mainstream sentiment that it would be an unseemly form of vengeance or “looking backward” to hold the previous administration legally accountable for torture. It’s a bizarre sentiment. The prosecution of any crime is inherently backward-looking. We prosecute law-breakers to keep them or others from breaking the law.

Now, exceptions can be made, and the

TRB *From Washington*

question of whom to prosecute is tricky. It seems unfair to prosecute CIA agents who tortured, as they had been specifically advised that techniques like waterboarding were legal. It’s likewise tricky to prosecute the Bush administration lawyers who wrote torture-authorizing memos. Administration defenders assert that those lawyers were “acting in good faith.” And, yes, they were making a good-faith effort to stop terrorism, but to suggest that they were making a good-faith effort to interpret the law insults their intelligence and ours. A recent *Washington Post* story leaves the impression that torture-memo author Jay Bybee, now a federal judge, realized the tendentiousness of his memos, which said waterboarding isn’t torture (and therefore is legal) because it does not inflict “severe physical or mental pain or suffering.”

The best defense against holding Bush officials accountable for torture is that September 11 freaked out the entire country and that we can’t judge their actions by the standards of how they look “on a bright, sunny, safe day in April 2009,” as Obama’s intelligence director puts it. This argument would carry more weight if Republicans had changed their thinking on torture and could be expected to follow the law the next time they won the presidency. Alas, they show little sign of intellectual progress.

Even after the release of the torture memos, Republicans persist in denying that techniques like waterboarding or chaining a prisoner in a standing position for hours constitute torture. The most common defense of waterboarding is that we subjected our own soldiers to it. That’s true—as a way of training them to withstand enemy torture. When you reverse engineer a torture-resistance program, you’re almost by definition engaging in torture.

In reality, Bush’s waterboarding methods did differ from the U.S. military’s torture-resistance training, in that our soldiers knew how far we’d go and

could stop the exercise if they couldn’t bear it. Conservatives have inadvertently confirmed this point. Numerous Republicans object that the release of the torture memos will render waterboarding and other techniques useless—“terrorists are now aware of the absolute limit of what the U.S. government could do to extract information from them,” complain former Bush officials Michael Hayden and Michael Mukasey.

It’s true. *Nobody* expects the Spanish Inquisition, or torture methods devised thereby. Our chief weapon is surprise. (Surprise and fear. . . . Amongst our weaponry are such elements as surprise and fear, as Michael Palin might put it.) That’s exactly why training soldiers to withstand waterboarding is different than actually waterboarding.

The worst part is that conservatives continue to view torture through the stylized prism of the Fox drama “24.” They discuss the practice as if the subjects are always terrorists, the interrogators always know just what information to ask for, and the answer can prevent imminent destruction. All of these premises are shaky.

First, there’s no such thing as a government policy of “torturing terrorists.” There’s only a policy of torturing people the government thinks are terrorists. Many of the suspected terrorists at Guantánamo Bay, subjected to agonizing stress positions, turned out not to be terrorists—not because the soldiers who captured them were venal, but because they were human.

Second, torture is designed to force prisoners to provide an answer the interrogator already knows. The torturer relents when his subject provides the “correct” answer. Intelligence gathering, by contrast, is designed to garner answers the interrogator does not already know.

Finally, yes, we can imagine ticking-time-bomb situations where regular interrogation methods work too slowly and extreme measures might prove helpful. But this premise bears the same relationship to the question of legalizing torture as the morality of stealing a loaf of bread to feed your starving family does to the question of legalizing theft.

It’s worth thinking about how likely the ticking-time-bomb scenario is to occur, and how our military and intelligence apparatus can be legally structured to account for it. But, first, Republicans are going to have to be disabused of their dramatic fantasies and reminded that a long war needs to be guided by the rule of law. ♦



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The Mall

Pimp My Rep

Congress, the reality show.

OMG! Have you *seen* Episode 7 of CNN.com's "Freshman Year"? *Unbelievable*. First, Congressman Jason Chaffetz (you know, the Utah Republican living out of his office) *totally* slams Nancy Pelosi at his birthday party, laughing about how he shares a birthday with "all the ugly people": the speaker, Aerosmith's Steven Tyler, comedian Martin Short, and that creepy old guy who played Spock in the original "Star Trek." Meanwhile, crunchy Colorado Dem Jared Polis gets to meet Bono (!), and they bond over how much they hate wearing ties. (Funny. I always thought gay guys had great fashion sense—although, at least this time Jared didn't overshare about how his one dress shirt has started

to smell.) Then there's the jumping back and forth like they always do: Jason talks a little about the census; Jared whips out a jar of bugs and a pic of some red trees to explain why he likes the FLAME Act (before you ask: It's got *nothing* to do with gay rights); Jason snarfs down *two* soft tacos at a Taco Bell reception; Jared puts his first bill *ever* (so adorable!) into something called the hopper. Then, get this: Two Jared staffers (including that tall blonde chick I absolutely *hate* b/c she's so skinny) prank Jason for April Fools'. They steal his Pop-Tarts, pudding, and M&Ms and leave him all these apples, yogurt Super Shots, and Kashi bars, *and* they swap a bunch of his shirts for a turtleneck (maroon!) like Jared wears. Of course, the girls just *happen* to get busted by Jason (how fake is that?), who *puts on the turtleneck* and pretends to be Jared.

He looked so goofy I swear I shot Red Bull straight out my nose.

For members of Congress, it's always a struggle to avoid vanishing into the shadow of the White House. Whether your team is in or out of power hardly matters, gripes one Democratic Hill aide via e-mail: "[H]onestly, if you're rank and file it's tough to get press no matter who's in charge." But, in the new Obama era, legislators find themselves in an unusually difficult spot: Our 44th president is the hippest, hottest star on the world stage today—a guy with so much buzz he makes your teeth vibrate. The average House member, by contrast, is one of 435 charisma-challenged, comparatively powerless dweebs. Under such circumstances, what's an ambitious but unglamorous lawmaker to do?

The same thing, it turns out, as any other American looking to scale the mountain of celebrityhood: become a reality star. Chaffetz and Polis may be the only two legislators with their own network-affiliated show. But plenty of their colleagues have embraced the whole casual, up-close-and-personal ethos of the genre. Forget C-SPAN gasbaggery or starchy pronouncements in *The New York Times*. Today's savvy Hill denizens, aiming to project a mix of grassroots connectedness and hip, new-millennium with-it-ness, are using tools like Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, the celeb-obsessed TMZ.com, and "The Colbert Report" to give America a peek at what its elected officials are really like. At the rate things are going, even the staunchest fans of transparency in government might soon have had enough.

YOU'VE GOT TO hand it to CNN: In casting its congressional docu-drama, the network found a near perfect "Real World"-esque pairing to supply the requisite dramatic tension. In the Republican corner stands the affable, goofy, highly telegenic Chaffetz: conservative, Mormon, committed junk-food aficionado. A businessman turned chief

WHITE HOUSE WATCH

With DREW FRIEDMAN



Bobby Jindal receives a contract for his memoirs.

of staff to Utah Governor Jon Huntsman, the 42-year-old father of three sleeps in his Capitol Hill office so he can send every penny back home to, as Chaffetz describes her, his “smoking-hot wife” Julie. He is disconcertingly energetic, neatly dressed, and well-coiffed, even for after-hours appearances like his 1:30 a.m. ambush of the guy who drives the automatic floor polisher through the corridors of the Rayburn House Office Building (see Episode Five). From across the aisle comes the slightly more reserved, slightly less telegenic Polis: liberal, Jewish, gay, (aspiring) vegan. A Web entrepreneur turned philanthropist, the 33-year-old Coloradan, one of the House’s wealthiest members, shares a Washington apartment with partner Marlon Reis. Allergic to suits and dress shoes, the chronically rumpled Polis likes to gripe about Congress’s dress code and provides video close-ups of his blistered feet. He tends to squint when he’s not wearing his glasses, and he typically looks in need of a haircut, even after he’s just had one.

Professional and sartorial contrasts aside, both co-stars place great faith in the power of new media to expand their political reach. “Through MySpace and Facebook,” says Polis, “I’m reaching people who don’t read the newspaper every day or follow the talking heads on television but whose votes count every bit as much as those who spend time following insider debate.” Polis and Chaffetz both blog, Twitter, maintain YouTube channels, and court Facebook friends. (“Jason and I have these little contests,” says Polis. “He actually has more Twitter followers, and I have more Facebook friends.”) Chaffetz in particular has warmed to video blogging. In addition to the hours of handycam footage he turns over to CNN for each show, the congressman produces nightly “cot-side chats” from the



folding bed in his office closet. These one-to-two-minute videos on the hot topic of his day (D.C. voting rights, the budget, the icky invasiveness of whole-body imaging in airports) are posted on Chaffetz’s House website, along with links to other memorable media moments—such as his January turn on Comedy Central’s “The Colbert Report.” (During his three hours of taping, Chaffetz, a former cosmetics executive, allowed host Stephen Colbert to give him a facial and lost three out of three rounds of leg-wrestling to him.) While playing straight man to Colbert or giving America a video tour of where he keeps his toothbrush, “undies,” and pudding stash may seem silly, Chaffetz says such shenanigans “create these great connections” with people—which, in turn, “opens a lot of doors” to talk about more serious matters.

Indeed, Chaffetz has far grander goals than winning converts to a particular policy position—or even winning extra votes back home. “I’m opening up a dialogue with a bigger, broader audience in the United States of America for the Republican Party in general,” he asserts. While the culture of reality television, YouTube, and Twitter has put down roots on both sides of the congressional aisle, Republicans seem to be embracing it in disproportionate numbers. (At last count, GOP Twitterers on the Hill outnumbered Democratic users by more than two to one.) As Chaffetz sees it, his out-of-power party has no choice. “We’re

essentially in the business of communicating rather than legislating,” he tells me. “Democrats have the numbers. If we want to be back in the majority, we’re going to have to win the communications battle.” At a January off-site meeting, Chaffetz stood up in front of his caucus and declared himself “their worst nightmare.” Boasting that he “ate one of our own” in the primary by building a grassroots network based on a more intimate, more direct, and more light-hearted connection with voters, he warned colleagues to do the same or brace for defeat. “It’s *killing* me,” he groans. “At the end of the day, we have the better message.” The failure, he says, is with the party’s “methodology” and messengers. “John McCain may be an American hero, but . . .” Chaffetz laughs awkwardly, clearly weighing candor against diplomacy. “He may be not the most dynamic, fun personality.”

Expressing optimism that the revolution will spread, Chaffetz notes that other lawmakers are engaged in similar outreach. Many members now maintain their own YouTube channels—some more enthusiastically than others. Ileanna Ros-Lehtinen, for instance, has set up cameras in her office and has staff video her off-site events. (Those looking for excitement can watch the Florida Republican engaged in such engrossing activities as flipping through a brochure at Native Tree Day at John Pennekamp State Park, standing around swatting bugs with volunteers at Croco-

Department of Corrections

In “Freeh Fall,” (May 6), Dennis Hobbie was misidentified as Dennis Hormell. In “Bravo Company,” (May 6), C-SPAN was described incorrectly as “government-run.” We regret the errors.

dile Lake National Wildlife Refuge, and posing for pictures next to a giant sandcastle at Islamorada's Island Fest.) Iowa Senator Chuck Grassley is known as a big Twitterer, as is Texas Representative John Culberson. Even Senator John McCain, who conceded last year that he didn't know how to use a computer and had "never felt the particular need to e-mail," has not only begun Twittering but recently participated, with ABC's George Stephanopoulos, in the first ever "Twitter interview." Admittedly, some members lean more heavily than others on ghost-Twitterers—up-close-and-personal has its limits—and, now and again, the technology leads a lawmaker to forget himself, such as when Republican Representative Pete Hoekstra Twittered about having just touched down in Iraq on what was *supposed* to be a hush-hush visit. But every novel communications phenomenon has its growing pains.

As for using old media in new ways, recent congressional guests on "The Colbert Report" have included Wyoming's Cynthia Lummis and Illinois's Aaron Schock, the 27-year-old freshman who—in one of the strangest signs of both the political and the media times—has been winning national coverage of his

six-pack abs from outlets ranging from TMZ.com (which has taken to stalking Schock) to CNN's "State of the Union" to ABC's "Good Morning America." Like Chaffetz, Schock sees value in reaching beyond the Sunday talk shows. He told CNN's Howard Kurtz that "some of these alternative forums are important because it gets non-traditional voters engaged. If they're learning about me on TMZ or some of these other blogs and YouTube videos, then they're recognizing my face and my name so that, when I'm out on CNN or the other networks talking about issues, they're going to maybe stop from clicking the channel and listen to what I have to say."

Chaffetz admits that not all of his colleagues are ready to loosen up. When he agreed to appear on "The Colbert Report," the congressman recalls, "a lot of people were critical. They said, 'Are you crazy? He'll tear you apart.'" And he doesn't even try to explain the CNN.com show to stodgier members: "They don't even get it. I don't even go there." But, to reach voters these days, he says, "you better make it fun, or people are going to tune you out." Worse yet: They might just vote you off the island.

MICHELLE COTTLE

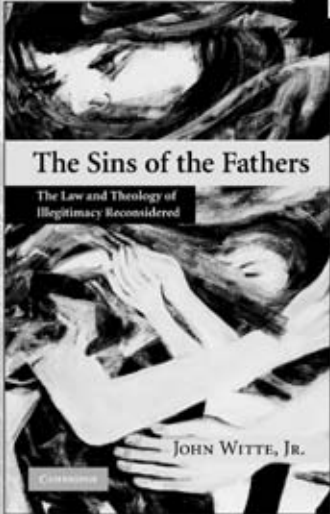
Truth or Dare

Obama wimps out on torture.

BARACK OBAMA is trying to split the difference on torture. He wants to move forward—no messy dwelling on the Bush-Cheney era—except that he'll look backward if forced. There will be no independent commission to hold top-ranking officials politically accountable. But, if Attorney General Eric Holder wants to prosecute the Bush lawyers who defended the legality of waterboarding—John Yoo, Jay Bybee, and Steven Bradbury—well, the president won't stand in the way.

What does Obama gain by this approach? For starters, he has delegated the hard choice to his subordinate—and has left himself room to maneuver once more if the political winds shift further. But, unfortunately, in the process of punting, he has gotten the policy wrong.

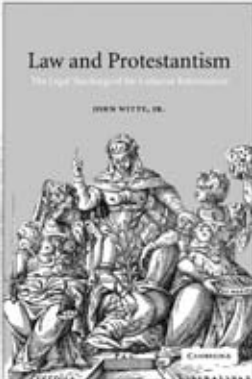
THE TORTURE MEMOS offend many people's moral sensibilities. They also offend standards for competent legal advice at the highest levels of government and were filled with contortions and shoddy logic. In his important book, *The Terror Presidency*, the dissident



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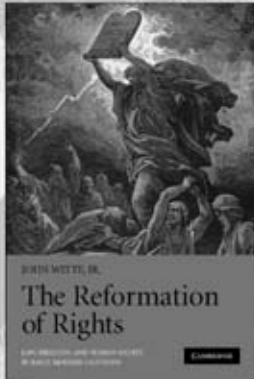
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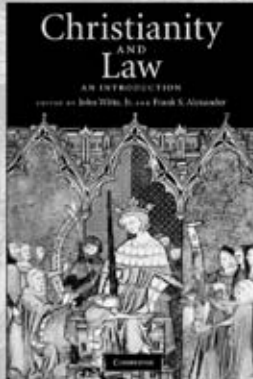
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In this staged shot, photographer Antonin Kratochvil has reconstructed a scene of abuse at Abu Ghraib prison.

head of Bush's Office of Legal Counsel Jack Goldsmith has described the memos as tendentious, overly broad, and deeply flawed. But should bad legal advice be grounds for prosecution—even when it justifies bad policy? Or, more to the point, should government lawyers ever be prosecuted for dispensing advice?

To prosecute the lawyers for violating the federal anti-torture statute passed in 1994 to criminalize violations of the U.N. convention against torture, a prosecutor would have to prove that Bradbury, Bybee, and Yoo knew that the law clearly forbade waterboarding detainees and twisted the definition as part of a conspiracy to justify torture. In other words, you would have to prove that they knew they were giving incorrect legal advice but gave it anyway in bad faith.

This would be a very hard thing to prove in court—requiring smoking gun evidence that's unlikely to exist. And there are other complications. When Yoo and Bybee wrote their memos, the anti-torture statute didn't unambiguously cover waterboarding. (This led to their contortions about the meaning of the phrase "intent to inflict severe physical pain or suffering.") It was subsequently clarified by Congress in the Detainee Treatment Act of 2005, which prohibited

inhumane treatment of prisoners but also immunized officials who relied in good faith on earlier legal opinions about the legality of torture. Congress didn't believe that the leaked Bush memos were so far beyond the pale that no reasonable officials could have relied on them.

What's more, there's the "unitary executive" defense that the Bush lawyers could plausibly mount. The unitary executive is the doctrine that they claimed allowed the president to override laws that constrained his discretion to do what he considered necessary in the war on terror. Since John Yoo, in particular, expressed his extreme views about unitary executive power before joining government, and, in many speeches, after he left government, it would be hard to prove that he didn't believe the memos he wrote.

As for Bybee and Bradbury, their poor legal advice may have been motivated by ambition, but not criminal intent. Bybee, a weak and ineffectual head of the Office of Legal Counsel, delegated too much unsupervised power to John Yoo at a time when he hoped to be promoted to a federal judgeship. The least sympathetic of the three is the hackish Bradbury, writing in 2005, when the terror threat alerts had cooled and he hoped to be elevated from acting to permanent head of the

OLC. But, to prove that Bybee and Bradbury didn't believe their own arguments, you would need evidence of e-mails, for example, where they ridiculed the unitary executive theory but said they would defend it anyway in order to curry favor with Dick Cheney.

You may find these defenses maddening. But they point to the danger of prosecuting government lawyers for their legal opinions (disciplining lawyers for malpractice, such as misstating the law through gross incompetence, is another matter). Alas, history is full of examples of White House and Justice Department lawyers offering dubious legal advice for political reasons, which didn't result in prosecutions. As FDR's Attorney General, for example, the future Supreme Court Justice Robert Jackson implausibly attempted to defend the legality of FDR's destroyers-for-bases exchange with Britain in 1940. More recently, when the Kosovo war lasted more than 60 days, Randy Moss, head of the Office of Legal Counsel under Bill Clinton, advised the White House that it could ignore the deadline in the War Powers Resolution, despite governing law to the contrary.

And it was wise for the government to never prosecute these cases—or even to disbar these lawyers, as the Justice

AP PHOTO/ANTONIN KRATOCHVIL/VII

Department's Office of Professional Responsibility might recommend for the Bush trio. That's because the threat of prosecution can easily be used to punish legitimate legal disagreement. Take the case of Monroe Freedman, former dean of Hofstra Law School and a prominent liberal legal ethicist. In 1966, he gave a lecture on the "Three Hardest Questions" for criminal-defense lawyers. Raising the possibility of an indigent client who perjured himself to his court-appointed lawyer, he said the lawyer might be justified in lying to a court to preserve the privilege against self-incrimination in addition to lawyer-client confidentiality. The suggestion was so explosive that Warren Burger, the future chief justice, tried unsuccessfully to have Freedman disbarred and fired from his faculty job. Freedman told me that, when lawyers are threatened with prosecutions for giving politically controversial opinions, witch hunts inevitably result that can deter the sharing of candid legal advice in the first place.

At the same time that Obama opened the door to prosecutions, he rejected the creation of an investigatory commission. The motivation here is clear: Obama believes that looking backward could create a political distraction that would harm the administration's efforts on health care and the economy.

But the fact that an independent commission would be politically distracting isn't a good argument for resisting it. The

Bush torture policies are the most serious violation of American values since the World War II internment of Japanese-Americans. A closed Senate intelligence committee investigation would be inconsistent with the transparency Obama demanded when he released the memos in the first place. At this point, only a full truth commission-style investigation can allow the Bush lawyers to make clear that they didn't conspire to break the law while focusing public opprobrium on the real architects and abettors of Bush's torture policies: namely, the policymakers—from Bush and Cheney themselves to George Tenet, John Ashcroft, and Condoleezza Rice, not to mention the top leadership in Congress.

Previous Washington investigations—such as Lewinsky-gate and Iran-Contra—foundered when, for political reasons, they became legalized, devolving into perjury traps and the search for dubious and novel legal infractions. An independent commission would indeed be politically embarrassing—the CIA would go ballistic; Democrats and Republicans would blame each other for having signed off on torture; and the country would be distracted from the economy and Iraq. But at least an independent commission would provide the accountability that the nation deserves, focusing blame not on legal scapegoats but on the politicians who devised the torture policy in the first place. That's an approach to scandal we can believe in.

JEFFREY ROSEN

Washington Blade revealed that the Log Cabin Republicans were \$100,000 in debt. A month later, another *Blade* story reported that a substantial chunk of the organization's budget was coming from the Gill Action Fund, an organization founded by multimillionaire gay activist Tim Gill that mostly donates to Democrats. This led some Republicans to grumble that the group was under the control of liberals. One former board member alleged to *Newsweek* that Gill "bought and paid for" the organization's decision not to endorse President Bush in 2004. Meanwhile, the group has yet to find a replacement for its most recent executive director, Patrick Sammon, who departed in January. It is currently being run by part-time staff.

And, now, on top of everything, a new organization has emerged that threatens to splinter an already small subset of the population—gay GOP activists—even further. Is there really room in Washington for two gay Republican groups?

THEY SPEND all their time attacking Republicans!" Christopher Barron complains to me over lunch, bemoaning what he sees as Log Cabin's increasingly liberal tilt. Barron joined Log Cabin as its political director in 2004 and, for the last three years, advised the group as a consultant. Now, he and former Log Cabin policy director Jimmy LaSalvia are the brains behind GOProud.

Barron and LaSalvia have no shortage of specific complaints about their former organization, but most are reducible to a simple allegation: The Log Cabin Republicans aren't sufficiently *Republican*. For instance, the duo argues that hate crimes and employment discrimination, two items high on Log Cabin's agenda, are not as important to most gay conservatives as standard Republican fare like estate-tax repeal and Social Security privatization—issues that they say particularly affect gay couples because of the lack of partnership recognition in many states and by the federal government. Barron, who attends both the annual Conservative Political Action Conference and Norquist's famous Wednesday morning meetings of movement conservative leaders, also lambastes Log Cabin for not being supportive enough of the GOP's embattled, relatively gay-friendly chairman, Michael Steele ("If he doesn't last, we're in deep shit," Barron says). And he complains that Log Cabin's "agenda looks like it was cut and pasted" from the website of the (left-leaning) Human Rights

Battle of the Homocons

Gay Republicans can't get along—both of them.

IT'S A SUNNY Friday afternoon in April, and Frank Ricchiazzi is addressing the annual convention of the Log Cabin Republicans at a hotel ballroom in downtown Washington. He is speaking about betrayal. A squat, goateed Vietnam vet from California, Ricchiazzi helped found the gay GOP activist group, and, among Log Cabin members, he is known as "the Godfather." He begins his speech by reminiscing about the organization's early days in the late 1970s. At the time, it had only two chapters, in San Francisco and Orange County, and "we didn't agree on anything," Ricchiazzi recalls. Nevertheless, gay Republicans were "*la famiglia*" and realized that, "so long as the family stayed together ... we would prosper."



Everyone in the room knows what Ricchiazzi is alluding to. Days earlier, two former Log Cabin employees had announced the launch of a new gay conservative organization, GOProud (pronounced "Go-Proud"). Already, it had received glowing endorsements from conservative activist Grover Norquist and *Wall Street Journal* columnist William McGurn. The Godfather does not seem pleased by this development. "We're a family," he intones. "If you've got problems, you come to the family and talk about them." His voice rises as he continues: "Anybody who breaks away from the family"—but, before he can take this line of thought any further, his audience cuts him off with applause. "Whatever garbage is out there, it's for going to the dump!" he concludes, in colorful, if not completely coherent, fashion.

Ricchiazzi's "family" is in trouble, and has been for a while. In January, the



Campaign, the country's leading gay rights organization. At the press conference announcing GOProud's launch—attended by about ten people, two of whom work for Log Cabin—Barron says that the goal of the organization is to “restore conservative majorities in 2010 and bring a conservative to the White House in 2012.”

Not surprisingly, Log Cabin defenders see things differently. On the question of whether the group too often attacks Republicans, a Log Cabin insider points out that the organization has endorsed a handful of GOP congressmen who supported the Federal Marriage Amendment but who later came out in favor of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act. (Log Cabin also endorsed John McCain in the general election.) Plus, GOProud's conciliatory approach toward the party may ultimately undermine the work of making it more gay-friendly. The same insider fears that “there's a danger” in GOProud being “used” by “Republicans who aren't very good, who will say, ‘Boy, the gays like us.’” Log Cabin partisans may be too polite to put it this way, but, in essence, the argument is that GOProud could become a group of Uncle Toms.

Their central complaint against GOProud, however, is that the new organization has less to do with substance than with sour grapes. That's because, after Sammon announced his departure as head of the Log Cabin Republicans late

last year, both Barron and LaSalvia applied for his job. The Log Cabin board rejected their bids early in the process. “It's all personal,” the Log Cabin insider says. “It's one hundred percent based on Jimmy and Chris trying to get back at the organization because of the way they'd been treated.” To that criticism, Barron responds that it's the “mission” of GOProud that's driving them. “Neither Jimmy nor I relish the work,” he says. “But we can't continue to sit by and hope someday that Log Cabin will get its act together.”

There are no signs of this quarrel at Log Cabin's Saturday gala dinner. In the back of the ballroom, a tattooed DJ with bulging muscles spins pulsating disco. One day after having delivered his heated denunciation of traitors—and after his organization had scored a major coup when McCain's senior campaign strategist, Steve Schmidt, delivered a widely covered speech endorsing gay marriage—Ricchiazzi takes the floor again, this time to lead the room in a recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance. Later that night, Meghan McCain, who has recently emerged as an outspoken proponent of gay rights, delivers the convention's keynote address. She has brought her hair stylist, Josh Rupley, to the event, and announces that he is “a proud new member of the Log Cabin Republicans.” In the Intra-Homocon War of 2009, winning Meghan McCain's hairdresser has to count for something.

JAMES KIRCHICK

School's Out Forever

Meet the 1,400 jobless New York teachers still getting paid.

IT WOULD SEEM like a pretty good gig: About 1,400 teachers in New York City are receiving full salaries and benefits even though they don't have permanent jobs. Two hundred and five of them have been without full-time work for three years. And they can continue receiving payments indefinitely even if they never secure new positions.

These educators are members of what is called the Absent Teacher Reserve (ATR), a program in which unionized teachers are placed when they don't have jobs. They end up there after being displaced by school closings, program cuts, or voluntary transfers. Technically, they work as classroom substitutes, but, when they don't have temporary assignments, they spend their days in school offices, cafeterias, and break rooms. And they are not required to seek full-time positions. “Teach one year, get [displaced], never apply for another job, but, as long as you work as a sub at full salary, you can get tenure at the end of that,” says Tim Daly, president of The New Teacher Project (TNTP), a New York-based education advocacy organization that monitors the reserve closely. And some ATR teachers, it seems, are content to stay right where they are. “I'm happy now,” one such teacher told TNTP researchers. “I don't have to prep, I don't have to grade

tests, I don't have my own class. I don't really have to do anything."

Over the last three years, the city has shelled out almost \$200 million to compensate ATR teachers. This school year alone, in the midst of a recession, TNTP has projected the reserve will cost about \$75 million. "I could use those [millions] to spend on early childhood education or to fund retention strategies to get our greatest teachers to stay," an official at the city's Department of Education (DOE) says.

Perhaps worst of all, the ATR is part of what was supposed to be an effort to free New York from the stranglehold its powerful teachers' union, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), had for decades on teacher hiring. The reserve was created in 2005, when the devastating flaws of the old hiring system—which privileged seniority and lifelong job security over teacher quality—were finally challenged. Reformers came up with a new system, one that compelled displaced teachers to compete for jobs, often against new, younger teachers. But the union, spurred by traditionalists sticking to a deeply rooted belief that teachers should be guaranteed jobs, pushed back. The final agreement extended old-style job assurances by guaranteeing that, even if teachers didn't have positions, they would always get paid.

Now, the recession is forcing New York to make massive budget cuts and refocusing attention on the city's contract with the UFT, which is up for renegotiation in the fall. Something must be done about the ATR. But, while reformers want to amend the rules governing the reserve, saying the ill-conceived 2005 compromises are the problem, the union's traditionalists argue that, if the new way isn't working, there's only one direction to go—back.

Meanwhile, as states look for ways to qualify for federal stimulus money by committing to increasing teacher effectiveness, New York stands as one model of what *not* to do.

THE BATTLE OVER teacher hiring is why, on a Saturday afternoon in late March, a group of angry veteran teachers gathered in a chilly Manhattan classroom. They were there to protest the ATR. Sitting at desks scattered haphazardly through the room, the educators shouted complaints as one woman scribbled notes on sheets of paper taped to the blackboard. They decried New York's mayor, his chancellor of education, and school principals, and they lamented this cabal's primary goal: to replace expe-

rienced educators with younger recruits. "A lot of principals don't want teachers who've been around for a while because when they say jump, we'll say, 'Why?'" one woman cried, her brow furrowing with anger. "A twenty-two-year-old would say, 'How high?'" Another woman holding an issue of the *International Socialist Review* silently shook her head.

Good veteran teachers, the group said, have been refused employment and are trapped in the ATR. "It's like in the nineteenth century, when people were thrown off farms and had to live in crummy parts of cities," grumbled one teacher, slumped at his desk in snakeskin cowboy boots and a shirt emblazoned with the UFT logo. (Five of the roughly two-dozen teachers in the room indicated that they had worked in the reserve as substitutes; one woman said she'd been doing it for three years.)

Their sense of entitlement dates back to 1961, when the newly formed UFT challenged the weak job security and low pay of the teaching profession. It negotiated a contract that guaranteed teachers jobs and gave hiring priority to the most senior educators. When teachers were displaced from jobs, they weren't unemployed for long; the school district's central office simply decided where to place them next, without input from teachers or principals. The most senior teachers got first dibs on vacancies. If openings weren't available, the district could bump out more junior staff. School systems around the country soon implemented versions of the program, widely called "forced placement," which remains the norm in most districts today.

Soon enough, however, problems began to appear. Districts could place teachers into grades or subject areas



that they weren't trained to teach, and principals were required to accept new staff whether they liked it or not. (In 2007, *TNTP* reported that, through Portland, Oregon's forced-placement process, "teachers are often slotted into grade levels with which they have limited or no experience.") The system also allowed schools to play musical chairs with bad teachers: Skillful principals would reorganize programs to eliminate the positions of poorly performing teachers or encourage them to transfer elsewhere. "It's just the dance of the lemons. Everyone knows about it," says Kate Walsh, president of the National Council on Teacher Quality.

Fed up with forced placement's defects, in 2005, the UFT and New York City's DOE crafted a new hiring plan called "mutual consent," which would oblige displaced teachers to apply for jobs rather than accept assigned ones. Seniority would no longer trump all other qualifications. Instead, displaced teachers would have to find vacancies, send out resumé's, and go on interviews, and they would face competition from applicants seeking to work in the school system for the first time. Principals would have final say over whom their schools hired.

Today, the vast majority of displaced teachers are rehired, and most approve of mutual consent. But the plan is deeply flawed because, in 2005, UFT refused to sacrifice its commitment to lifelong job security. It won the ATR, which means that, while displaced teachers have to compete for jobs, there is no consequence if they do not find them. They would simply get paid to wait in the ATR.

Today, teachers lingering for months, even years, in the reserve are more likely than the rest of the city's educators to have "unsatisfactory" performance ratings, and many haven't applied for new jobs online, where the city maintains an employment database, or attended a job fair. "There's no way we'd design this system if we started over from scratch," says Tim Daly of *TNTP*.

Last fall, the UFT insisted that persistent ATR teachers weren't being hired because it cost schools less to bring on new teachers who, as junior recruits, had lower salaries. *TNTP* found no hiring bias against ATR teachers, but the city agreed in September to pay the schools the difference between a reserve teacher's salary and that of a new hire.

But critics aren't satisfied. They say the city has mounted a smear campaign to garner support for eliminating the ATR,

currently a bulwark preserving teachers' lifelong job security. They argue that the DOE and school principals have allowed some veteran teachers (particularly union activists) to languish in the ATR and then used the press to marginalize them as a lazy, unqualified lot. "[There is] a scarlet letter on them that hasn't been erased," says UFT President Randi Weingarten, who is also head of the UFT's umbrella organization, the American Federation of Teachers.



Participants at the March meeting—sponsored by a self-described "dissenting caucus" of the UFT—are leading a campaign to get the city to repeal its mutual-consent policy, including the ATR. And they echoed Weingarten's grievance (though they also called her a "failed labor leader" for agreeing to scrap forced placement in the first place). Wearing black boots, army pants, and a skin-tight shirt that said "UNDEFEATED," a reserve teacher standing by a snack table declared himself a "political prisoner." He blamed principals with whom he doesn't get along for keeping him out of a job. "We can take these bastards!" he fumed. Another re-

tired teacher shouted that the city's attacks on seniority and job guarantees "will make the AIG crooks look like gold."

The ideal, reform-minded outcome of New York's fracas would be a *better* mutual-consent policy. Chicago, one of the only other big U.S. school systems to adopt mutual consent, allows teachers to remain in reserve for ten months, after which they are removed from the public payroll. Some experts also advocate allowing reserve teachers to go on unpaid leave after a specified amount of time; were they to find new jobs, they could return at their old salary levels. New York could also provide reserve teachers with enhanced job-search support. And the city would need to improve teacher evaluations and the rules for handling instructors who aren't measuring up.

But implementing such a comprehensive program is, in the words of one New York DOE official, "a long shot," because of growing opposition and outrage from the UFT and teachers clinging to the past. "I've been in those meetings, in those screaming matches," says the DOE official, describing hiring policy negotiations. "It would be a real uphill slog."

SEYWARD DARBY

Wall Street Civil War

Banks and hedge funds turn their dark armies of lobbyists against each other.

THERE'S A TENDENCY, in the endless discussions about the economic crisis, to think of the entire financial industry as a single, ultra-powerful actor. Big commercial banks, nimble hedge funds, even the odd insurance company all get lumped together under the heading "Wall Street," with its sinister, Death-Star connotations. In a recent story about relations between the financial world and Obamaland, no less a populist organ than *The Wall Street Journal* offered up such a conflation, noting that the administration, "after months of criticizing Wall Street, has been scrambling to woo top bankers and financiers to back its latest bailout plan."

In fact, there are real differences among these species of moneymen. Top executives at large commercial banks tend to be a little older, a little stodgier, a little more politically conservative than their counterparts at hedge funds and other money-management firms. Traditionally, the bankers have also been far more sophisticated about navigating Capitol Hill. That's especially relevant in the current crisis, when the interests of

the two groups increasingly diverge and Washington is being forced to adjudicate. And perhaps no episode better illustrates the gap in political savvy than the battle over housing legislation now boiling over in the Senate.

EVER SINCE 2007, Congress has been grappling with a way to ease the millions of foreclosures piling up in the wake of the housing bust. Any solution needs to accommodate the fact that banks don't keep most of the loans they originate. Instead, they sell them off for repackaging as securities, which investors buy. But the banks continue to service the mortgages—collecting payments from homeowners each month—and it falls to them to work out a modification. Which is to say, while the banks have the authority to modify a loan, they often don't have a strong financial interest in doing so, since they no longer have a stake in the mortgages. Worse, the banks actually face a huge disincentive: investors irate that they lowered their returns.

Among the Democrats' preferred solutions to this problem is something called "cram-down"—that is, allowing bankruptcy judges to modify a mortgage and unilaterally impose the new terms. When Obama unveiled his own housing plan in

ANTHONY RUSSO

February, he asked Congress to revive the cram-down idea as part of a carrot-and-stick approach to helping borrowers. The carrot would be cash incentives—a series of \$1,000 payments—for banks to perform modifications. Cram-down would serve as the stick.

Almost immediately, investors and banks joined forces to snap that stick like a twig. Investors hated the cram-down idea because they worried judges would force them to accept, say, lower interest payments for the sake of distressed borrowers. The big banks had similar worries for the mortgages they keep. Many also hold on to second liens (basically, second mortgages) after they sell off the first and worried that judges would wipe those out entirely. And both groups generally feared the arbitrary ways judges might wield their power.

But a funny thing happened while the big banks and investors were uniting against the cram-down push: The banks cut their own deal. Top executives at four large banks—Citigroup, Bank of America, J.P. Morgan, and Wells Fargo—descended on Congress to proclaim they'd love nothing more than to modify mortgages, just like the president wants. It's just that, with all those greedy investors out there, you never know who's going to sue. The solution, they argued, was a "safe harbor" provision: Give us legal immunity, and we'll modify all the loans you send us. "They said it's necessary to protect them from lawsuits," recalls one House Democratic aide. "Our position was, to the extent there are barriers to modifications, let's erase those barriers." (Spokesmen for J.P. Morgan and Wells Fargo declined to comment; the other banks did not return calls.)

From the banks' perspective, the beauty of legal immunity was that it would give them a free hand to modify mortgages owned by investors while collecting cash incentives from the government and protecting their second liens—a proposition potentially worth billions. From the investors' perspective, it meant the cost of modifications would come entirely out of their pockets. If the fight in Congress was essentially over who would eat hundreds of billions of dollars in housing market losses, the genius of the banks was to realize early on that, given the political environment, it wasn't going to be homeowners. That left them duking it out with investors, even if the latter weren't aware of it.

And so, while the investors droned on to glassy-eyed congressmen about the sanctity of their contracts, the banks waxed

expansive about all they wanted to do for the man on the street. "The investors don't make a sympathetic case. The banks positioned themselves as happy to help modify the loans," says one neutral finance industry lobbyist. "By essentially throwing investors under the bus, they created a glide path for loan modifications."

When the House passed its bill in early March, the investors were stunned to see that it contained the safe harbor provision they feared and loathed. They'd hardly realized it was even on the table and had made no attempt to fight it. Their only consolation was the belief that safe harbor was joined at the hip to the cram-down measure, so the banks would work with them to defeat the entire package in the Senate. But it soon became clear that Senator Dick Durbin, who was spearheading the cram-down legislation, had no intention of letting it torpedo the overall bill—which, in addition to safe harbor, also included a larger credit line for the FDIC. (Durbin eventually decided to slice off cram-down for a separate vote.)

The investors realized they'd been had. They quickly pulled out of the broader lobbying effort and formed their own group—called the Mortgage Investors Coalition—which spent most of April frantically pleading their case. They argued that, even without safe harbor, the lenders had all the legal protection they needed. They insisted the only thing safe harbor would accomplish is to protect banks who made fraudulent loans, which they'd essentially be able to launder through modification.

The investors also finally adopted the universal language of Washington lobbying: the fight for the little guy—in this case, homeowners. "The borrower and investor have aligned interests here," Micah Green, head of the Mortgage Investors Coalition, recently told me. "The goal of this whole process should be to get the homeowner in a position where they not only can stay in homes, if at all possible, but where they want to stay in their home."

True, a modification might lower monthly payments, Green conceded. But he said it wouldn't change the fact that many mortgages are underwater—that is, the borrower owes more on the mortgage than the house is worth—a scenario

that leads people to walk away. (Administration officials disagree, citing extensive research showing that when modifications actually lower payments, people living in homes they own tend to stay put even if they're underwater.)



ALAS, IT MAY BE too little, too late. Pressed by the big banks, the Senate just defeated cram-down and is on the verge of passing safe harbor in early May. (J.P. Morgan CEO Jamie Dimon was spotted in the chamber on Wednesday.) "We're trying to cram six-to-eight months of education into three-to-four week period," bleats one beleaguered investor lobbyist.

In the end, the problem for investors was largely sociological. Banking is a heavily regulated industry; in order to succeed, a bank's top executives must be as deft at navigating Washington as they are at lending money. But, with a few important exceptions, most hedge funds live by a meritocratic credo: You make money by having the more sophisticated computer model or arbitrage strategy. "Traditionally, investors aren't lobbyists, they don't have an eye toward Washington," says the finance industry lobbyist. "They have an eye on deal-making." That helps explain the irony that, even though Obama himself is closer to more hedge fund managers than bank executives, the banks look to have won this fight. (The administration did finally work out a compromise between investors and banks on the second-lien issue, though.)

From the public's perspective, it's not a bad thing that private investment firms are belatedly emerging as a separate interest group on K Street. Yes, the investor arguments about the dangers of mortgage modifications are self-serving. And, other things being equal, it's hard to see why the average person should care whether banks or hedge funds end up shouldering a bigger share of housing-market losses.

But, given the banks' central role in causing the financial crisis and their outsize influence in Congress, investors could serve as a needed counterweight. For example, it's far from clear that banks won't abuse the safe-harbor provision they've lobbied for; if it passes, the investors could push to prevent them from using it as a shield against liability for peddling fraudulent mortgages. Investors could also play a constructive role on other issues, such as the attempt by banks to return their bailout money quickly in order to wriggle free of pay restrictions. Investors who own the banks' bonds aren't likely to be keen on this, because the bailout money insulates them from potential losses. Think of the new dynamic as a kind of Iran-Iraq war come to Capitol Hill: Where there are no obvious good guys, the next best thing may be two powerful rivals beating each other to a pulp.

NOAM SCHEIBER

Airplane!

How a fighter jet explains why we're losing the war on terror.

MICHAEL CROWLEY

PAKISTANIS TREAT their military achievements like pop icons. Photos of the nuclear scientist A.Q. Khan are waved at rallies, and a street in Islamabad bears his name. Replica models of the mountain site where the country tests its nuclear bombs stand at the center of traffic circles. And the angular black silhouette of the F-16 fighter jet is such a treasured image that it is often found on the brilliantly colored commercial trucks that rumble along Pakistan's highways. "If you drive behind those trucks, they have pictures of F-16s painted on the mud flaps," says Shuja Nawaz, a South Asia expert at the Atlantic Council and author of a recent book on the Pakistani military. "It is part of the popular culture of Pakistan."

Pakistan's *Top Gun* mentality is partly about its archrival to the east. Equipped to carry nuclear bombs, Pakistan's F-16s would be a main vehicle for annihilating Indian cities in an all-out war. But the F-16 is also a symbol of Islamabad's impressive clout in Washington. Every one of the country's F-16s, acquired over the past 30 years, was manufactured and sold by the United States—proffered by presidents keen to maintain good graces with the nascent Islamic nation, despite widespread objections that America was foolishly coddling a dangerous and undemocratic nuclear power.

Unfortunately, this object of national pride can do almost nothing to save Pakistan from the greatest threat to that country today, which is not India but a growing domestic insurgency. A single-engine fighter capable of breaking the sound barrier, the F-16 is perhaps the world's most versatile combat jet—effective at both air-to-air combat and medium-range bombing missions. Israel used it to bomb Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor in 1981, and NATO F-16s bombed Serbian positions in the Balkans in the 1990s. But it is virtually useless for battling the small bands of Taliban fighters who have recently advanced to within 70 miles of Islamabad.

That's why there's a move afoot in Congress to cut off U.S. funding for Pakistan's beloved F-16 program. But the effort, like similar ones before it, seems destined to fail. As a result, the U.S. military aid that Pakistan direly needs for counter-insurgency equipment will instead continue to fund its ability to attack India.

This contorted situation raises some fundamental questions about the Pakistan crisis and America's ability to solve it. For instance: Which enemy is Pakistan more interested in fighting—Islamic radicals or the Indians? And can Washington



ever really get tough and deny Pakistan something it wants without risking a loss of cooperation in the effort to stabilize Afghanistan and maintain Pakistan as a Western-aligned ally? The answers may turn out to be disappointing, in part because, for Pakistan, the F-16 has become something more than just a flashy fighter jet. It has become a supersonic, supercharged symbol of the entire U.S.-Pakistan relationship, and one that is not tinkered with lightly.

THE STORY OF Pakistan's love affair with the F-16 is also the history of America's dysfunctional relationship with the country. In 1981, shortly after the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, the United States pulled Pakistan close with the sale of 40 F-16s. Four years

later, the U.S. Senate banned military aid for Pakistan unless it halted its efforts to develop a nuclear bomb. It was a half-hearted effort, however. At the time, America cared less about proliferation than about Pakistan's help in driving the Soviet Union from Afghanistan—so, for several years, the United States looked the other way. In 1989, George H.W. Bush sold Pakistan another 28 of the jets for \$22 million apiece.

Before the planes were shipped, however, the Soviet Union retreated from Afghanistan; now Washington needed less from Islamabad—and got tough. When the United States reached the obvious conclusion that Pakistan did, in fact, have a nuclear weapons program, the Bush White House halted the shipment of F-16s. The jets were mothballed at a military base in the Arizona desert known as "The Boneyard." Adding insult to injury, Washington refused to reimburse Pakistan for the \$656 million it had paid to U.S. defense contractors—and even charged Pakistan for storage and maintenance costs.

The move poisoned America's image in Pakistan. Military and civilian leaders fumed over the insult. "Our relationship with the Pakistani military really took a nosedive when we halted the shipments of F-16s," says Andrew Exum, a fellow at the Center for a New American Security. "Part of the reason we're in such a mess in Pakistan is that we don't have high-level contacts [with Pakistani generals]. And those relationships suffered because of the halted F-16 shipments."

No kidding. Bruce Riedel, who recently led the Obama administration's review of Afghanistan-Pakistan policy, has written that the F-16 switcheroo convinced Pakistan's officer corps that the United States can't be trusted, and that it "sees Pakistan as a condom, [to be] used and then thrown away." In a chilling reflection of broader public opinion, the

AP PHOTO/B. K. BANGASH

F-16s even became a cause célèbre for Al Qaeda: Among the public demands of the terrorists who kidnapped and later murdered *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl was delivery of the F-16s. For a full decade, Pakistan fulminated over its lost armaments. Only after its government threatened to sue the United States—and hired former White House lawyer Lanny Davis, a close friend of Bill and Hillary Clinton—did the Clinton administration reimburse Pakistan's money.

But even that payback didn't satisfy Pakistan. Soon after September 11, George W. Bush assembled a \$1 billion-plus aid package to ensure Pakistan's help in fighting terrorists. But Pakistan's military ruler, Pervez Musharraf, said his country still wanted its jets. When Bush refused, Musharraf grumbled about the negative effect on "public perception" in Pakistan. Four years later, Bush relented and sold Musharraf 36 new F-16s for \$1.4 billion, plus a \$891 million deal to upgrade Pakistan's existing fleet of early-1980s vintage jets (the order was later halved due to Pakistan's budget woes after a major 2005 earthquake). As *The New York Times* put it, the sale—probably possible only because Pakistan had become flush with U.S. foreign aid—was viewed as "a reward for [Pakistan's] cooperation" in the fight against terrorism.

Never mind that such cooperation was limited at best or that Pakistan had offered scant cooperation with the investigation of A.Q. Khan's nuclear bazaar. For a Bush administration dealing with the worst violence in Iraq and with no clear strategy for maintaining stability in Pakistan and Afghanistan, it was a symbolic gesture, given in the hope that Musharraf might yet become a savior. And, for Musharraf, it was a personal coup that enhanced his stature at home.

The deal wasn't uncontroversial. Then-Senator Joe Biden, among others, denounced the F-16 sale, calling it a "reckless action" that "should be reversed, immediately," unless Pakistan embraced democracy. And the deal soon looked all the worse when it became clear that—despite its promises—Pakistan couldn't actually pay for the planes. In June 2008, it emerged that Pakistan was having trouble coming up with money to

pay for the upgrades to modernize its F-16 fleet. Ever kindly, the Bush administration shifted roughly \$230 million from an account earmarked by Congress to pay for Pakistani counterterrorism equipment like Cobra helicopters and surveillance planes and directed it to pay for the F-16 upgrades. That payment amounted to more than two-thirds of all the U.S. counterterrorism spending on Pakistan. The Bush team also signaled that it would be looking to shift *another* \$142 million for the same purpose the following year.

Livid, congressional Democrats staged a hearing sarcastically titled, "Defeating Al Qaeda's Air Force: Pakistan's F-16 Program in the Fight Against Terrorism." At the hearing, Bush officials halfheartedly argued that F-16s were in fact useful against terrorists and insurgents. (In truth, only highly trained pilots, which Pakistan lacks, can conduct such operations without vast collateral damage to civilians.) But their central argument continually circled back to symbolic diplomacy. "Our willingness to provide F-16s," one State Department official, David Camp, argued, "has become an important symbol in Pakistan." To drive home his point, Camp cited those "brightly decorated trucks" bearing F-16s logos.

In the end, Congress relented—grudgingly. "Nobody likes this, nobody's enthusiastic," says one congressional

drama once and for all. After all, Pakistan still owes some \$400 million for the F-16 upgrades, and some suspect that the country won't have the remaining money for the new jets either. ("If they can't come up with the money to pay for the upgrades, you have to wonder how they're going to pay for the new F-16s," says the congressional aide.) Hence a Pakistan aid bill recently crafted by House International Relations Committee Chairman Howard Berman would cut off the use of any more U.S. funds for the purchase or upgrade of Pakistan's F-16s.

But, even now, opponents of cracking down make a strong case. The F-16 may be a diversion from the true crisis facing Pakistan. It may be a terrible use of scarce U.S. taxpayer money. But, like his predecessors, Barack Obama still desperately needs the cooperation of the Pakistani military in fighting the Taliban and rooting out Al Qaeda. Sending the planes may simply be the least bad option. "Cutting off F-16s is viewed in Pakistan as a hostile action," says a Senate aide. "The military feels they need F-16s to defend against India, rightly or wrong. The general population feels it's a matter of national pride. So this is really poking them in the eye."

In contrast to the House approach, the Pakistan aid bill produced by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee says nothing about F-16s. The House approach is too blunt for the Senate's tastes. Writing a funding cap into law will be seen in Pakistan as another "huge slap in the face," says the Senate aide. Moreover, F-16 funding "is a very powerful lever"—one that should be used privately and subtly to induce concessions from Islamabad.

Of course, the United States has spent decades trying to convince Pakistan to do things that are in our interest, often with only illusory success. Now, in the coming weeks

Congress—along with the Obama White House—will have to decide how much longer it's willing to cater to Pakistan's fighter-jet fixation. With all 18 F-16s from Pakistan's 2005 purchase still on the assembly lines and yet to be delivered, there's good reason to think the long and strange F-16 dogfight between Washington and Islamabad is far from over. ♦



aide familiar with the issue. "Why should the U.S. pay for aircraft that are primarily meant to be used against India? It's infuriating."

NOW THAT THE Obama administration is overhauling America's approach to Afghanistan and Pakistan, some members of Congress want to shoot down the F-16

The Green Bubble

Why environmentalism keeps imploding.

TED NORDHAUS and MICHAEL SHELLENBERGER

SOMETIME AFTER the release of *An Inconvenient Truth* in 2006, environmentalism crossed from political movement to cultural moment. Fortune 500 companies pledged to go carbon neutral. Seemingly every magazine in the country, including *Sports Illustrated*, released a special green issue. Paris dimmed the lights on the Eiffel Tower. Solar investments became hot, even for oil companies. Evangelical ministers preached the gospel of “creation care.” Even archconservative Newt Gingrich published a book demanding action on global warming.

Green had moved beyond politics. Gestures that were once mundane—bringing your own grocery bags to the store, shopping for secondhand clothes, taking the subway—were suddenly infused with grand significance. Actions like screwing in light bulbs, inflating tires, and weatherizing windows gained fresh urgency. A new generation of urban hipsters, led by Colin Beavan, a charismatic writer in Manhattan who had branded himself “No Impact Man,” proselytized the virtues of downscaling—dumpster-diving, thrift-store shopping, and trading in one’s beater car for a beater bike—while suburban matrons proudly clutched copies of Michael Pollan’s *In Defense of Food* and came to see the purchase of each \$4 heirloom tomato at the farmer’s market as an act of virtue.

For those caught up in the moment, the future seemed to promise both apocalypse and transcendence in roughly equal measure. *The New York Times* and *San Francisco* magazine ran long feature stories on the uptick of upper-middle-class professionals who worried to their therapists about polar bears or who dug through the trash cans of co-workers to recycle plastic bottles, as though suffering from a kind of eco-OCD. At the same time, folks like Pollan and Beavan provided a vision of green living that seemed to offer not just a smaller carbon footprint but a better life. Amid the fear was the hope that the ecological crisis would bring us together and make us happier.

And then, almost as quickly as it had inflated, the green bubble burst. Between January 2008 and January 2009, the percentage of Americans who told the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press that the environment was a “top priority” dropped from 56 percent to 41 percent. While surveys have long showed that enthusiasm for all things green is greatest among well-educated liberals, the new polling results were sobering. For the first time in a quarter century, more Americans told Gallup in March that they would prioritize economic growth “even if the environment suffers to some extent” than said they would prioritize environmental protection “even at

the risk of curbing economic growth.” Soon thereafter, Shell announced it would halt its investments in solar and wind power.

Policymakers took note. As gas prices continued their upward trajectory, climate legislation to cap carbon emissions garnered less support in the U.S. Senate last summer than it had in 2003 and 2005. Confronted by chants of “Drill, baby, drill,” Senate and House Democrats, led by candidate Barack Obama, embraced offshore oil exploration, reversing nearly a quarter-century of opposition. When it came time to justify stimulus investments in energy efficiency and renewables, the president did so in the name of job creation, not polar bears. And, last month, after floating the idea of forcing cap-and-trade legislation through Congress as part of the budget, the White House quickly backed down in the face of opposition from Senate Democrats, especially those from the hard-hit Midwest.

Today, Beavan and others pitch green lifestyles as thrifty ways to make ends meet in a difficult economy. And, no doubt, many Americans are seeking out some form of (in)voluntary simplicity in response to the financial crisis. But making virtue of necessity is not the same as making necessity of virtue. Whatever romanticized vision of a simpler life that might have existed a year or two ago has largely been replaced by a fearful vision of a life of poverty or, at least, greater insecurity. Today, the *Times* and other newspapers run stories about how Americans are coping with their economic, not ecological, anxieties.

Of course, environmentalism itself has not disappeared. Earth Day was celebrated last week, magazines and marketers continue to use green to sell to upscale audiences, and legislation to cap carbon emissions, albeit heavily watered-down, could still pass Congress. But the cultural moment marked by the ubiquity of green self-help, apocalypse talk, and cheery utopianism has passed. It is tempting to reduce this retrenchment to economic pressures alone, with concrete short-term concerns trumping more abstract worries about the future. But a closer look at the causes of the green bubble reveals a more complicated story, not just about the nature of environmentalism but about modern American life itself.

THIS ISN'T THE first time an eco-bubble has inflated and then burst. In fact, the modern environmental movement was born in a bubble. In 1969, an industrial pollution fire on the Cuyahoga River in Cleveland, Ohio, generated national publicity and outrage. The first photographs of Earth in its entirety transmitted from outer space were received as signs of a new ecological consciousness. The first Earth Day was held

ANDREW JOHNSON/ISTOCKPHOTO

in 1970, and, over the next three years, Congress passed and (a Republican) President Nixon signed into law sweeping environmental statutes.

But, in 1973, soaring oil prices pushed the country into recession. By the time Jimmy Carter suggested, a few years later, that profligate American lifestyles were partly to blame, the public reacted with resentment and ridicule. Three years later, Ronald Reagan was tearing Carter's solar panels from the White House and blaming trees for pollution.

The second green bubble began to grow in the summer of 1988, when NASA scientist James Hansen testified to Congress about the arrival of global warming. Coupled with images of the Amazon in flames and record heat and drought across much of the United States, it was easy for the press to wrap global warming in an end-of-times narrative. The following January, *Time* magazine eschewed its usual "Man of the Year" profile and declared Earth "Planet of the Year." In 1990, President Bush signed a Clean Air Act amendment on acid rain, and, two years later, he signed a global-warming treaty at a United Nations meeting in Rio de Janeiro.

But the bubble had already begun to deflate. In 1990, California voters rejected a sweeping environmental initiative by a two-to-one margin. The recession of 1991 and 1992 mostly pushed green issues off the table, and Gore, in a move that would foreshadow his own run for president eight years later, would spend much of his vice-presidential campaign with Bill Clinton downplaying his role as a leading environmental advocate. In 1994, Clinton's proposed energy-consumption tax played a significant role in costing Democrats control of the House of Representatives, and, three years later, the Senate unanimously rejected the Kyoto treaty before Gore could even fly to Japan to negotiate it.

Much like the most recent episode, each of these past bursts of environmentalism waxed and waned with the rise and fall of the economy. But, perhaps more significantly, the green bubbles inflated during highly polarized periods in American society and politics, often fueled by disastrously violent episodes in foreign

policy. In the late 1960s, the Vietnam War motivated student militancy at home, which then combined with the civil rights, feminist, and gay freedom movements to open up a social divide that would last a half century. In the 1980s, Reagan's confrontations with the Soviets and his proxy wars in Central America split the country, and the old cultural divisions reemerged with a vengeance.

George W. Bush's administration, much like the Nixon and Reagan years, was a time in which American liberals felt alienated from the White House. But, while the first and second green bubbles were co-opted by the Republican presidents of the time, Bush resisted the third. The war in Iraq, the crackdown on civil liberties at home, and the president's strident nationalism combined to create a story line in which Big Oil, imperialism, and global capitalism threatened apocalypse well before Gore warned of a "day of reckoning." The green cultural moment, with its emphasis on redemption, harmony, and healing, was less a response to the fear of future ecological disasters than to present-day social ones.

At the same time that liberal professionals were feeling estranged politically, they were also feeling alienated personally and socially. For perhaps the first time in history, according to New York University sociologist Dalton Conley's new book, *Elsewhere, U.S.A.*, American elites were working longer hours than the poor. They were making more money, but the price they paid was longer commutes, the commodification of everything (from private schools to bottled water), and less time for themselves, their families, and their friends. Inequality skyrocketed during the 1990s, resulting both in new affluence for the wealthiest 20 percent and in heightened social anxiety. In these conditions, upper-middle-class liberals started questioning and resenting hyper-materialism, even while enjoying the status and comfort it offered.

Little surprise, then, that they would start buying a whole new class of products to demonstrate their ecological concern. Green consumption became what sociologists call "positional consumption"—consumption that distinguishes one as elite—and few things were more eco-

positional than the Toyota Prius, whose advantage over other hybrid cars was its distinctive look. A 2007 survey that appeared in *The New York Times* found that more Prius owners (57 percent) said they bought the car because it "makes a statement about me" than because of its better gas mileage (36 percent), lower emissions (25 percent), or new technology (7 percent). Prius owners, the *Times* concluded, "want everyone to know they are driving a hybrid." The status effects were so powerful that, by early 2009, Honda's new Insight Hybrid had been reshaped to look like the triangular Prius.

Of course, for many greens, healing required more than a new kind of consumption, however virtuous. In *The New York Times Magazine's* 2008 Earth Day issue, Michael Pollan argued that climate change was at bottom a crisis of lifestyle and personal character—"the sum of countless little everyday choices"—and suggested that individual actions, such as planting backyard gardens, might ultimately be more important than government action to repair the environment. Pollan half-acknowledged that growing produce in your backyard was ecologically irrelevant, but "there are sweeter reasons to plant that garden," he wrote. "[Y]ou will have begun to heal the split between what you think and what you do, to commingle your identities as consumer and producer and citizen."

It's easy enough to point out the insignificance of planting a garden, buying fewer clothes, or using fluorescent bulbs. After all, we can't escape the fact that we depend on an infrastructure—roads, buildings, sewage systems, power plants, electrical grids, etc.—that requires huge quantities of fossil fuels. But the ecological irrelevance of these practices was beside the point. What downscalers offered was not a better way to reduce emissions, but rather, a way to reduce guilt. In 2007, we asked environmentalists in focus groups about green consumption. None thought that consuming green would do much of anything to address a huge challenge like global warming. They did it anyway, they said, because it made them feel better.

Utopian environmentalism has, to some extent, always promised to heal the alienation wrought by modernity. But,



during bubbles, increasing numbers of Americans become captivated by the twin thoughts that human civilization could soon come crashing down—and that we are on the cusp of a sudden leap forward in consciousness, one that will allow us to heal ourselves, our society, and our planet. Apocalyptic fears meld seamlessly into utopian hopes. The end of the world is near—unless we heal all that divides us.

TO OBSERVE that green bubbles are fueled by the discontent of upper-middle-class liberals is not to dismiss environmentalism as elitist. Against nostalgic accounts like Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*, most social-change movements are started and directed by the relatively affluent and well-educated, from the preacher-led civil rights movement to modern feminism to gay rights. The problem is not that most greens are elites, per se, but rather that too few of them acknowledge the material basis for their ecological concern and that too many reject the modern project of expanding prosperity altogether.

Recall that the inconvenient truth for which Gore named his movie was “that we have to change the way we live our lives”—and nobody could have the impression, after watching the movie, that it would be for the better. No new technology could save us—we would have to live differently. The public got the message. Of the 67 percent of voters who told the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press in 2006 that it is possible to reduce the effects of global warming, nearly twice as many said it would require major sacrifices than said it could be done with technology. When eminent physicist Freeman Dyson suggested in *The New York Review of Books* in 2008 that we could deal with global warming by creating carbon-eating trees, he was widely ridiculed. What critics seemed to find most offensive was the idea that a big environmental problem like climate change might be overcome without significantly altering modern life.

There are, to be sure, negative and disorienting aspects of modern life: pollution, alienation, loneliness, inequality, and the proliferation of choices. But the truth is that, while we often talk of our desire for greater community and interconnectedness, we choose ever more privacy, autonomy, and personal freedom. Few of even the most ardent greens could seriously imagine subsuming their individual identities to a pre-agrarian tribe, or abandoning their office jobs for a life of hard agricultural labor. The retreat from older forms of community, and the

move toward greater individuation, is universal and largely positive. Colin Beavan and Michael Pollan lament, respectively, the loss of community and the loss of connection between humans and the land. But both choose to live alone with their families in cities, not on agricultural communes, and both express themselves as unique thinkers and writers.

Green anti-modernism brings with it other contradictions. Despite the rhetoric about “one planet,” not all humans have the same interests when it comes to addressing global warming. Greens often note that the changing global climate will have the greatest impact on the world's poor; they neglect to mention that the poor also have the most to gain from development fueled by cheap fossil fuels like coal. For the poor, the climate is already dangerous. They are already subject to the droughts, floods, hurricanes, and diseases that future warming will intensify. It is their poverty, not rising carbon-dioxide levels, that make them more vulnerable than the rest of us. By contrast, it is the richest humans—those of us who have achieved comfort, prosperity, and economic security for ourselves and for our children—who have the most to lose from the kind of apocalyptic global-warming scenarios that have so often been invoked in recent years. The existential threat so many of us fear is that we might all end up in a kind of global Somalia characterized by failed states, resource scarcity, and chaos. It is more than a little ironic that at the heart of the anti-modern green discourse resides the fear of losing our modernity.

Nonetheless, it has become an article of faith among many greens that the global poor are happier with less and must be shielded from the horrors of overconsumption and economic development—never mind the realities of infant mortality, treatable disease, short life expectancies, and grinding agrarian poverty. The convenient and ancient view among elites that the poor are actually spiritually rich, and the exaggeration of insignificant gestures like recycling and buying new lightbulbs, are both motivated by the cognitive dissonance created by simultaneously believing that not all seven billion humans on earth can “live like we live” and, consciously or unconsciously, knowing that we are unwilling to give up our high standard of living. This is the split “between what you think and what you do” to which Pollan refers, and it should, perhaps, come as no surprise that so many educated liberals, living at the upper end of a social hierarchy that was becoming ever more stratified, should find the remedies that

Pollan and Beavan offer so compelling. But, while planting a backyard garden may help heal the eco-anxieties of affluent greens, it will do little to heal the planet or resolve the larger social contradictions that it purports to address.

Even in the United States, different interests help shape different attitudes: Poorer Americans in states more dependent upon cheap coal electricity are far less likely to support policies that would cost jobs or significantly increase energy prices than are wealthier Americans on the coasts, whose energy supply is already much cleaner. Believing that our common interest in halting global warming should bring us together, Al Gore spent some of the \$300 million he raised from his movie and rock concerts on magazine and TV ads attempting to overcome partisanship. His ads showed famous people who disagreed—such as Nancy Pelosi and Newt Gingrich—sitting down together on a couch. He called it the “We Campaign.” We might disagree on politics, the ads said, but we can all agree that we need to do something about global warming. But Gingrich recently testified against the climate-change legislation Gore favors.

The idea that a common connection to nature might allow us to overcome our divisions and transcend the essential messiness of politics is an idea that is as old as it is fantastical. Politics will always involve conflict, contradiction, and compromise. Fashioning a way forward will require us to frankly acknowledge our different interests as well as our common interests. While utopianism has a bright side—it is a way of imagining a better world—it also has a dark side characterized by escapism and a disengagement from reality that marks all bubbles, green or financial.

Whether or not environmental leaders are able to recalibrate their politics for a post-bubble moment, all of us would do well to be suspicious of revulsion at modern life and our longing to transcend it. The low-grade dissatisfaction that almost all of us have felt is not a reason to forsake our modern lives but rather an inescapable consequence of the extraordinary choices, opportunities, and security that envelop us—and of the self-awareness and individualized identities that modernity itself makes possible. As such, the contradictions that drive our dissatisfaction and desire for transcendence are irresolvable. And this we should celebrate. ♦

Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger are the authors of BREAK THROUGH: WHY WE CAN'T LEAVE SAVING THE PLANET TO ENVIRONMENTALISTS and founders of the Breakthrough Institute.

The Year of the Elephant

Our cold war with Iran unfolds in Lebanon.

DAVID SAMUELS

YES, SOMETIMES I GO into the room with my advisers and I start shouting. And then they say, ‘And then what?’ The question hangs in the perfectly cooled air in Sa’ad Hariri’s marble-floored sitting room, where Beirut appears as a sunlit abstraction visible at a distance through thick windows. Hariri’s father, the former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, martyr of the Cedar Revolution, arches his black eyebrows from a giant poster near the sofa, looking out at his son with a side-long, mischievous glance. “It hasn’t been a joyful trip,” Sa’ad Hariri is saying. “In the past four years, I have lost friends. Pierre Gemayel was my friend. My father was murdered. It’s been an agonizing four years.”

You can see at once what life has become for him. Sa’ad Hariri is a fun-loving guy who enjoys playing Xbox and sports a neat, three-tiered arrangement of facial hair that makes him look like a late-night magician from Las Vegas. Now, he spends most of his days indoors, in a lavishly appointed eight-story building ringed with checkpoints. Surrounded by security guards, aging generals, and family advisers, he takes meeting after meeting in preparation for Lebanon’s June 7 election, while heroically passing up the succulent lamb dishes and tasty Lebanese sweets that are offered to his guests. The streets around his headquarters are closed to vehicular traffic to prevent another car bombing like the one that killed his father. Banners outside read “Al Mustaqbal”—“The Future”—the name of the Sunni political movement at the center of the March 14 coalition, which takes its moniker from the date of the massive public demonstration that helped pressure Syria to leave the country in 2005 and is backed by the United States and Saudi Arabia in their effort to keep formal political power in Lebanon from passing into the hands of Hezbollah.

“Yes, this is a very nice house,” Hariri says, when I compliment him on the impressive luxury of his surroundings. “But you try living in a house, any house, for four years without going outside.” To reduce the chances of a security breach, he leaves the building on short notice, zipping off in armored convoys to hand out new sports centers and improved sewers to his supporters, who are the beneficiaries of hundreds of millions of Saudi dollars that are flowing to Hariri’s coalition. In the evening, he retires to a single secure floor of his adjacent residence. If he wants to go out at night to restaurants or cafés, he has to leave the country. “It’s like living in a bunker,” he says with a shrug.

The secure rooms in which Sa’ad Hariri spends his days and nights could not be more different from the location Hez-

bollah leader Hassan Nasrallah uses to broadcast his regular TV addresses to the people of Lebanon—which is said to be an underground bunker in Beirut, equipped with an air filtration system and a dedicated fiber-optic link. From their opposing bunkers, the two men are vying for supremacy in the June parliamentary elections. The March 14 coalition, anchored by Hariri’s Future Party, includes the remnants of the Christian Phalange party, as well as Druze leader Walid Jumblatt’s Progressive Socialist Party. Hezbollah runs a joint parliamentary list with Amal, a Shia party that presides over an old-fashioned political machine that would be recognizable in Chicago. Together, the Shia parties anchor the opposing March 8 coalition, which receives material aid from Iran and Syria and also includes the Christian followers of General Michel Aoun, a Bonapartist figure who regards himself as the rightful savior of Lebanon.

The true importance of the June 7 elections has less to do with the contest between Hariri and Nasrallah, or the formal balance of power inside Lebanon, than it does with the increasingly tense struggle between the two main power groupings in the Middle East: the alliance of America’s regional clients that includes Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Israel; and the Iranian-Syrian axis whose push for a bigger share of political power in Lebanon was ratified by last year’s Doha agreement. The formal power-sharing arrangement reached by the Lebanese in Doha can be understood as the product of a political stalemate that resulted from a Syrian campaign of assassination and a

failed attempt by the U.S.-backed government to counter Hezbollah’s weapons by extending the power of the state. The Doha agreement granted Hezbollah and its allies a “blocking third” in the cabinet, which allowed the Party of God to veto any decisions of the Lebanese government with which it did not agree—like taking Hezbollah’s cameras out of the airport, or shutting down the party’s private communications network, or controlling the country’s borders with Syria so that Iranian missiles cannot continue to enter southern Lebanon.

There are two likely outcomes in the upcoming election—a narrow Hezbollah loss or a narrow Hezbollah win. A narrow loss will ratify the veto power granted to the party in Doha. A narrow win will give Hezbollah formal political control over the Lebanese state. Either way, the election will provide very public evidence of the declining influence of the United States in Lebanon and the growing power of Iran. In the new Middle East, Tehran—armed with the strategic insulation that nuclear weapons confer—will be able to destabilize any government it doesn’t like without fear of military reprisal. As nearby regimes



weigh the pros and cons of life inside the nuclear cage with the Iranian tiger, Lebanon offers a preview of what the future might be like.

EVERYWHERE I GO in Beirut, I find the same strange oscillation between the assumption of relative normalcy and the belief that in a week, or a month, or a year at the most, the country will collapse. (The New Opinion Group, an NGO aligned with March 14, has brought a group of American journalists here, including me, Jacob Weisberg of *Slate*, Michael Tomasky of *The Guardian*, and Judith Miller, formerly of *The New York Times*. The organization deserves thanks for paying for much of the trip, helping to arrange some of my interviews, and turning a blind eye to my meetings with people it disapproves of.) I have coffee in the upscale Christian neighborhood of Ashrafiyeh one afternoon with a young Shia artist who teaches in the public schools. She tells me that her students are being trained to use weapons at clubs led by the Lebanese Forces militia of Samir Geagea, a Hariri ally. Her best friend, a Sunni woman who lives in

Dahiya, Hezbollah's stronghold, shudders at any talk of politics. "I will give my support to no one," she says, as she plays with her long black hair. "I want to eat. To dance." Recently, she visited her sister in Toronto, she says, but she doesn't think she will be going again. Leaving the country makes it harder to live here. If she could, she would leave Lebanon and never come back.

Earlier that day, my group met with the secretary-general of the March 14 movement, Fares Souhaid, who is the kind of honest public intellectual you might find teaching sociology at a university in the former Yugoslavia. There are indeed Shia who back March 14 and oppose Hezbollah, he says. He describes the movement's support among the Shia as consisting of "drug traffickers," "leftists from Baalbek and Bekaa," some members of traditional families and clans ("but they are very weak"), as well as "some persons who are very modern," who were born in Africa and educated in Paris and became "over-civilized." When someone asks about the prospect of an Iranian bomb, a young Shia reporter nods his head, gesturing toward a dozen well-meaning intellec-

tuals and newspaper editorialists affiliated with the March 14 movement who are sitting around the table: "The people you see here will be in front of the U.S. Embassy and the Canadian Embassy trying to get a visa."

Violence here takes place in the shadows, with occasional public eruptions like Hezbollah's 2006 war with Israel, or the events of May 2008, when the central government moved on Hezbollah's private communications network, backed by Sunni villagers armed with light weapons who had been imported from the north. The result of this amateurish gambit was that Nasrallah sent his cadres into the streets, disarmed the Sunnis, and seized Beirut from the central government, which then granted him a slice of formal state power at Doha.

In between such delicate moments, you can get a pretty accurate sense of how Lebanon works by sitting in a restaurant in the Albergo Hotel, a decidedly luxurious place where I had lunch with a former intelligence professional and watched a dozen Lebanese cabinet ministers savor excellent Italian dishes. The tailored suits, the loosened ties, the broad hands, the arrangement of tall

Billboards sponsored by Michel Aoun—who is part of a coalition with Hezbollah—urge women to “be beautiful and vote.”



JOSEPH BARAK/AP/GETTY IMAGES



A Lebanese patrol through Tripoli passes a poster of Sa'ad Hariri.

flowers in the center of the room—the scene had the sunlit inner presence, the radiant sensual completeness, of the world of physical objects as painted by Bonnard or Vuillard. Watching the ministers as they conducted their business, it was easy to see how the philosophical embrace of the physical world makes good sense here. Nasrallah and his patrons in Iran guarantee the stability of the country while, day to day, mouthing all kinds of insane stuff designed to paralyze the faculty of reason. Someday soon, the key will turn in the lock, the door will open, and they will blow Lebanon to smithereens. Meanwhile, there are precious moments of physical existence to be savored, such as a diamond necklace for one's wife, a pair of earrings for one's mistress, a sizeable deposit in a numbered bank account, and shrimp fettucini at the Albergo.

OUTSIDE THE FADING mansion of Amin Gemayel, the former Lebanese president, a group of middle-aged guards goes through my bags while keeping an eye on the street traffic for signs of unusually rapid acceleration. Gemayel served as president between 1982 and 1988, as a replacement for his brother Bashir, who sought to end the Lebanese civil war by inviting the Israelis in to kick the Palestinians out, thereby assuring continued Christian political supremacy. A strong, arrogant guy, Bashir Gemayel was blown up by a large bomb, which is a common fate for people who try to remake Lebanon.

With his dark tanned skin, proud nose, and gray hair swept back from his forehead, Amin Gemayel looks like he would be at home on the deck of a sailboat in

the south of France. His eyes have the watery, dignified look of injured nobility. Hezbollah, Gemayel says, is a "*cheval de Troie*"—a Trojan horse—that serves the interests of Iran. "Hezbollah is considered to be part of the Pasdaran," he says, using the Farsi name for the Revolutionary Guard. "In the form of Hezbollah, they get a brigade of the Iranian army on the Mediterranean and on the border with Israel. So one hundred million dollars a year that they spend here is nothing."

However accurate his intelligence may be, it is clear that Amin Gemayel, with his patrician bearing and his talk about Lebanese neutrality, belongs in a waxworks museum dedicated to a Middle East that doesn't exist anymore. Gemayel's longtime ally and enemy, Walid Jumblatt, is a more relevant factor in the upcoming elections. Whip thin, with a bald pate, long hair in back, and a drooping salt-and-pepper mustache, he looks like Pete Townshend of The Who, or any other aging English rocker who has turned to the life of a country squire. The impression of aging rock-and-roll royalty is heightened by his blue jeans, which are nicely accented by a blue shirt collar poking up beneath his thin, charcoal-colored cashmere sweater.

The idea of disarming Hezbollah by force is absurd, Jumblatt says. "We can do nothing," he explains, dismissing the failed assault on Hezbollah last May. "It was a mistake by the Hariri clan. They thought that by bringing some elements from the north they could alter the balance of power in Beirut. It was a big mistake."

While May 2008 was a defeat for Sa'ad Hariri, Jumblatt says, it was also a defeat

for Hezbollah. He expects Hezbollah to make more such mistakes in the future. "It is not nice to be in a bunker," Jumblatt says, speaking of Hassan Nasrallah as he reaches down under the table to massage the skull of his large white dog. "Being away from reality, you will ultimately fail to grasp reality."

It is clear that Walid Jumblatt is hedging his bets. He is increasingly friendly with Amal leader Nabih Berri. They talk often on the phone. U.S. military power is ebbing out of the region and won't be coming back anytime soon. Two years from now, or five years from now, or nine months from now, Iran will test a nuclear bomb, and then the new order will be revealed. No one wants to get caught on the wrong side.

ON A SATURDAY afternoon, I skip the announcement of the March 14 movement's electoral platform and take a cab to the headquarters of the Internal Security Forces (ISF), secure whitewashed barracks that seem to exist on a different planet from the slow-paced languor of Lebanese government ministries. Uniformed men move with a sense of direction and purpose that makes it impossible to linger for more than five seconds in a hallway or by an elevator without someone pressing a button and moving you on your way. Heavy blast doors seal off the secure areas of the building, and approaches are monitored on omnipresent flat-panel video screens. The furniture is brand new, and the hallways are lined with Lebanese flags and martyr portraits of ISF officers who were blown up by Syrian bombs. This is the preserve of Major General Ashraf Rifi. His office is large, functional, and clean. The display cases on the walls are filled with policemen's trinkets, including a pewter plate from the Germans and a discrete inscribed plaque from Detlev Mehliß, for gathering evidence in the Hariri investigation, which is now stalled at The Hague.

Rifi is a Sunni Muslim with the pale complexion and erect bearing of a veteran French colonial officer. He speaks fluent French, which is a suitable language for lost causes. I ask him whether he imagines a time when officers of the Pasdaran, of whom there are said to be about three dozen inside Lebanon at the moment, would not be able to use his country as a military base. "I think everyone in my position would hope for the day when they can control the security of their country one hundred percent," he says with a sigh. "I hope that, whether he is an Iranian officer, or a

Syrian, or from anywhere else, that they can enter the country in an official way, in a normal manner.”

If one is searching for a sign that Lebanon is not a ghost state completely at the mercy of foreign powers, then the ISF is probably the place to look. The organization’s proudest success of recent years is the unraveling of Fatah Al Islam, a terrorist group that had fought the Lebanese army to a standstill for three months in the spring and summer of 2007 at the Palestinian refugee camp of Nahr Al Bared. According to ISF sources and a variety of published and broadcast news reports, the members of Fatah Al Islam included a motley assortment of Lebanese, Chechens, Saudis, Yemenis, and Syrian Palestinians, who thought they were going to training camps in order to learn how to fight the Americans in Iraq. “I think that Fatah Al Islam is an organization fabricated by some intelligence services, in a rather complex manner,” Rifi says, choosing his words very carefully as he eyes the tape recorder on his desk. “I think that only the Lebanese magistrates can define the relationship between Fatah Al Islam and the Syrians or other groups.”

After first taking control of weapons, explosives, and other material belonging to a Syrian-backed group called Fatah Al Intifada inside the Nahr Al Bared camp, the organization began robbing banks. It set off bombs in a Christian village on the eve of the second anniversary of the Hariri assassination and hatched plans to create a Sunni jihadist emirate in the north. After killing more than 160 members of the Lebanese security forces in a three-month-long siege at Nahr Al Bared, the leaders of Fatah Al Islam somehow escaped. Led by a new generation of homegrown Lebanese Sunni jihadists—who were apparently ignorant of the fact that their organization was not a real jihadist group, but a front being manipulated by the Syrian state security services—the organization began another bombing campaign targeting the Lebanese army and the ISF.

At this point, local security sources and some published reports suggest, the Syrians seem to have realized that the group had spun out of their control and may have betrayed its leaders to Lebanese state security through a local proxy. Confronted with the Syrian betrayal, the new Fatah Al Islam abruptly reversed course, and set off a 200-kilogram car bomb in Damascus near an intelligence complex. (In a March 2007 *New Yorker* article, Seymour Hersh suggested that Fatah Al Islam was being turned against

Syria at the behest of Vice President Dick Cheney.)

The story of Fatah Al Islam shows two important things about Lebanon: The first is that, appearances aside, political violence here is orchestrated by states, not by local organizations and individuals. The second is that the few security successes that one can attribute to the central government over the past five years can just as easily be used to demonstrate the limits of the government’s meager capacities. Syrian state security found other creative ways to strike at the ISF and destabilize Lebanon, beginning with a series of bombs that targeted ISF officers who were close to Ashraf Rifi and had participated in the investigation of the Hariri murder. “Wissam Eid was an engineer in telecommunication and I.T. who presided over our technical branch,” he explains, when I ask him about the murdered ISF officer whose portrait hangs throughout the building. “They killed him for the files about major crimes in Lebanon, because they knew that he had played an important role.”

While Rifi declines to name the people behind Eid’s killing, he agrees that the death of his aide was not an accident, but rather a message that was intended for him by an outside power—which could only be Syria. “It is the third message,” he explains. The first message was when someone rigged a grenade to explode at the door of Eid’s home in the Beirut neighborhood of Hadath. As Eid went to open his door, the grenade went off prematurely, and he escaped unharmed. The chief ISF investigator on the Hariri case, Lieutenant Colonel Shehadeh, was then targeted by a bomb that killed four of his bodyguards. “All of these messages are, I think, directed to me, saying, ‘Stop improving your capacity to confront terrorists,’” Rifi tells me.

Given the fact that the ISF is powerless to stop the Syrians from setting off bombs, it is silly to expect the internal security service to stop Iranian military officers from operating inside the country. Hezbollah regularly thumbs its nose at the ISF and the Lebanese central government, which is powerless to control it. In a speech delivered on February 16, 2007, for example, Hassan Nasrallah had this to say about the question of whether Hezbollah was obeying United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1701 and 1559, which prohibited the organization from importing more arms into Lebanon. “We are being very clear and we are saying that we have arms,” Hezbollah’s leader boldly declared. “We have arms ... of all shapes and sizes. ... The resis-

tance has arms. It is saying it in public, adding that it is rearming and increasing the scope of its armament in order to get more dangerous arms.”

Nasrallah then proceeded to do what the Lebanese security services are too afraid to do, which is to describe exactly how the arms are transported. “We are transporting the arms secretly and in straw trucks so as to not embarrass you,” he explained, speaking directly to the Lebanese government. “I am saying that we will remain on the border, in Beirut, and everywhere in Lebanon.”

THE DAHIYA neighborhood of Beirut where Hezbollah makes its home is an odd mix of tree-shaded streets, run-down alleyways, and large apartment blocs that seem like they were airlifted from Gaza City. On my way to see a Hezbollah official, I drive past an amusement park for the Third World poor, one of those places where a smiling generic cartoon mouse welcomes children to ride the Tilt-A-Whirl. Young girls in black robes and headscarves stand by the entrance to the park with babies in their arms and younger children tugging at their sleeves. The amusement park is where older sisters can be with their friends while giving their overburdened mothers a break. The roads are lined with large green-and-yellow martyr posters of the famous terrorist Imad Mughniyah—assassinated last year in Damascus—with a slight smile tugging at the corners of his well-trimmed beard. Yellow construction cranes are everywhere.

The scale of the destruction visited on Dahiya during the 2006 war can be measured in two ways—by the depth of the numerous apartment-building-sized pits filled with rubble, and by the even greater number of new 15-story-tall construction shells. Outside each half-finished structure is a large placard with a dreamy, semi-abstract architect’s rendering of what the finished building will look like. Finding the algebraic equation that reconciles martyr posters of Imad Mughniyah with the promise of brand-new apartment buildings featuring plate glass windows and flush toilets is the key to understanding what goes on here. One explanation is that Hezbollah is a real political party that answers to the spiritual and material needs of the Shia of Lebanon, who seek justice and wish for a better life for their children. Another is that what the people of Lebanon want and what they get have no necessary connection to each other. The real decisions are made elsewhere.

The Hezbollah media office is located above a shop selling tapes and videos of Musa Al Sadr and other Shia religious paraphernalia in a small building off Bir Al Abd street. I am accompanied up the stairs by Judith Miller, the pixie-ish former *New York Times* reporter. We are ushered into a room with an ornate wooden high-backed couch with carved arms and reddish upholstery. It is the kind of furniture that is sold to poor people on credit. My grandmother in Montreal had a living room set like that, in a more cheerful blue and gold fleur-de-lis pattern which she covered in plastic to make the upholstery last longer. Ibrahim Mousawi, the Hezbollah media chief, asks me to fill out a form listing my home and office address and to provide him with a copy of my passport. I look over at Judy Miller, who shrugs. I hesitate for a moment, calculate a Brooklyn street address that is located in the middle of the East River, write my new address on the form, then take out a Canadian national identity card from my wallet.

The formalities concluded, I ask Mousawi to explain the conditions under which Hezbollah asks Iran for advice. "It has nothing to do with Iran," he says. "These are purely religious questions. In Shia Islam," he continues, in his modest, scholarly way, "we have a concept called the Wilayat Al Faqih, the mandate of the jurisconsult, or Supreme Guide. I wrote my dissertation in England on this subject. The Wilayat Al Faqih is a concept that is central to Islam, but it was crystallized in the thought of the Ayatollah Khomeini. Even when the Ayatollah Khomeini was living in France, he was still the Wali Al Faqih. So you see that this is a purely religious question that has nothing to do with Iran. The followers of the Wali Al Faqih would emulate him wherever he is, and wherever they are."

I ask Mousawi if he would agree that all questions in life have a religious dimension. He gives me a curious look, and then agrees. "Like the question of whether three fighters should explode themselves against an Israeli patrol, in a certain time and place near the border," I suggest. Mousawi is an intelligent man who enjoys the process of disputation. "Every aspect of life has a religious dimension," he answers. I ask Mousawi about a quote from Hezbollah's number two, Naim Qassem, in which he talked about submitting Hezbollah's decision to become a political party in 1992 to Iran. He reaches into his bookshelf and tosses me a copy of Qassem's book, translated into English. "Find it," he says. Score one for Mousawi.

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Later, once we are back in the car, we pass one of the biggest rubble-filled pits I have ever seen, the size of a city block. Something awful happened here. The scale of the destruction reminds me of the giant hole in the ground that lingers across the river from my apartment in Brooklyn. The block where we are standing was a group of 17 apartment buildings that housed a large number of high-level Hezbollah functionaries, my companion tells me. The Israelis leveled the entire block in three minutes on the last day of the war. "They are thinking that Hassan is here," he says. We get back in the car and drive down a side street, past the Ayatollah Khomeini, looking somber in a long black robe with his outstretched sorcerer's hand summoning forth his magic from the ruins.

TONIGHT, Hassan Nasrallah will give a speech in honor of the birth of the Prophet Mohammed. His functionaries and supporters will gather to hear him in a meeting hall in Roweis, an enormous Quonset hut with a sign out front prohibiting the entrance of weapons and cell phones. Nasrallah himself will not be in the hall, but rather in a bunker thought to be equipped with a fiber-optic cable connected to Hezbollah's proprietary communications network. The signal will make its way from Nasrallah's bunker, presumably through filters that will disguise its origin, and then be routed over to the hall. Cameras inside the hall will broadcast pictures of the audience back to their leader, so he can see the reaction to his words. Footage from the two locations will then be cut together by Hezbollah's technicians to provide viewers with the illusion that the speaker and his audience are communicating with each other in the same room.

I watch Nasrallah's broadcast from the studio of Future TV, which is, by far, the nicest television studio in Beirut. Inside, glass-fronted executive triangles are cantilevered over a spacious bullpen that is bisected in turn by a translucent glass catwalk that looks like the kind of retro-spaceship design feature you might see in a Prada store. The banks of plasma monitors on the wall offer a montage of our interconnected world. There is Putin in a black sweater talking from Moscow, the Dalai Lama, Lance Armstrong, and young sheiks in robes. The Brazilian national soccer team celebrates a goal. Al Jazeera shows a carefully edited montage of scenes from Israel: Benjamin Netanyahu, girl soldiers with guns, shabby, run-down blocks in Tel Aviv, and bearded weirdos dancing with

a Torah scroll. When Hezbollah came here in May 2008, my friend tells me, it didn't smash or burn any of the equipment. It snipped a few wires, and the station went dark.

Nasrallah is speaking. A big bank of red and yellow roses in front of him distract attention from the fact that he is not inside the meeting hall, but in a bunker. He is wearing an earth-brown robe, which suggests springtime and new beginnings, and a black turban. Behind him is the yellow flag of Hezbollah, half-furled, which has combined with the Lebanese flag standing next to it so that the two flags appear to be one. It is the flag of the new Lebanon.

Nasrallah begins as he always does. "I take refuge in God from the accursed Satan," he says, before he congratulates his listeners on the anniversary of the prophet's birth.

The Year of the Elephant, in which the Prophet Mohammed was born, occurred 40 years before the birth of Islam, he says. In that year, the Abyssinian King Abraha, whose realm extended into the Arabian Peninsula and Yemen, decided to attack Mecca and demolish the holy Ka'aba. But his efforts failed. "So finally Abraha—just as the world's tyrants usually do—resorted to forming a huge army and mustered all the strength and weapons that were available in that age, and harnessed a number of elephants."

Abraha headed for Mecca, and the Arabs fled. Quraysh, the master of the city and its diverse tribes and clans, could not protect the Ka'aba. Nasrallah's listeners are clearly meant to identify the parallels between today's political players in the Middle East and Abraha's mighty elephants, the panicked Arabs, and the wealthy traders who ruled

Hezbollah militants display arms and an image of Hassan Nasrallah.



APPHOTO/MAHMOUD ZAVAT/NEWS.COM

Mecca. To defend the Ka'aba, Nasrallah continues, Allah sent flocks of birds, "feathered flocks," carrying "stones of baked clay . . . small stones, which they began to hurl at the soldiers, horses, and elephants. The army panicked and its defeat began."

Nasrallah speaks in a clear and fluent way, without pausing or stumbling. His voice is energetic and insistent. He looks down occasionally at his notes, on sheets of white paper that he hides behind the roses. As he talks, the camera switches back and forth from his face beneath the lights inside the bunker to shots of the crowd in the big hall in Dahiya, where little kids sit on plastic chairs with their mothers and rows of men gaze up at the screen, fingering worry beads and smoking cigarettes. The reaction shots make Nasrallah look less isolated. "Even in the details of the event we find that Almighty God—in order to humiliate those mighty and arrogant aggressors—did not send against them the greatest, strongest, and toughest of His creatures," Nasrallah explains, "but sent against them birds that hurled at them small stones to defeat them."

There are plenty of clues as to the patched-together nature of the performance that viewers are watching. The notables seated in the front row of the lecture hall gaze up at their leader in an odd way, because the screen queers the normal angle at which you would hold your head while listening to a speaker in a public hall. Nasrallah is sweating heavily, which suggests that he is standing in a small room under hot lights. I wonder about the heat signature of an air-conditioning unit powerful enough to cool a windowless TV studio. The camera cuts to bored-looking women in the audience and then to a row of three cute little kids, each with a Hezbollah flag. One of the kids has a Lebanese flag, which the others examine curiously. Guys in Hezbollah security vests patrol the aisles. Every time the video switches back to Nasrallah, the audio switches, too, and the applause from the hall abruptly cuts off.

"I also tell you with all frankness that this International Criminal Court has never proved that it is a fair court," Nasrallah says, attacking the call to prosecute President Omar Al Bashir of Sudan. "For thirty-three days in the July war, television screens kept showing Israeli crimes, the killing of women, children, and the elderly and the devastation and destruction of entire villages, and not only neighborhoods. This was done by

clear orders and sponsorship of Olmert, Livni, Halutz, and others, but this court did not bat an eye."

Thumping, scratching at himself, he marks time with the rhythmic motion of hands, which opens up space in the listener's mind for his thoughts to enter. His voice is outraged, and then conversational. He squeezes the listener in his grasp, in the mathematical procession of his logic, which moves from point to point in an unhurried and clear way. Then he releases the tension with a high note of outrage, or a sardonic joke. He's the best thing going in Dahiya on a Friday night. There is no question that if the purpose of the Lebanese elections were to select the most capable man in the country, regardless of party or foreign affiliations, Nasrallah would win in a landslide.

America's call for dialogue is evidence that the United States is weak, and its policies in the region have failed, he says. "Iran is thirty years old, eight years of which were war and twenty-two years were sanctions. But its strength, impregnability, and presence are growing. It is going into space and manufacturing its materials, both civilian and military."

Nasrallah has many complaints about the West. The West puts Hezbollah and the Al Manar TV station on its terrorism list. It puts individuals on the list, too. "One of them was Al Hajj Mughniyah, God have mercy on his soul," Nasrallah says. He wants everyone to know about Imad Mughniyah. "They say, 'You are accused of well-known acts of terrorism. But we will forgive you,'" he says, mocking those in the West who call for dialogue under the mistaken impression that they hold the power. "They accused us of shedding the blood of the Americans, but they will forgive us."

The Americans have only two conditions, he continues, which are to recognize Israel and renounce violence. "As for the U.S. conditions, they are rejected," he says shortly. "I tell you, and today is the anniversary of the birth of the prophet, may God's peace and blessings be upon him, and this year is 2009 which coincides with the year 1430 of the *hegira*: Today, tomorrow, one year from now, and even after one hundred or one thousand years and till doomsday, we, our children, and grandsons and our generations, and as long as we are Hezbollah, we will never recognize Israel." The crowd rises out of their seats and pumps their fists in the air. This is what they came to hear.

"Israel is a usurping entity," Nasrallah continues. "It is a racist and aggressive

state. It is a terrorist state. By what standard can a Muslim or an Arab recognize such an entity and simply say that this is Israel?" he asks.

The logic of the Year of the Elephant is the only logic that the enemy has. It is the logic of defeat and impotence. It is pre-Islamic logic. Hezbollah manfully rejects such proposals. Never in a thousand years will Hezbollah recognize Israel or renounce violence, in deed or even in words. "If we stand on our feet, enhance our resolve, and join hands together and stand shoulder to shoulder," he promises, with a heroic shudder, "we will be able to defeat this entity and even to eliminate it from existence."

The news shows immediately report on his every word, because he holds Lebanon in the palm of his hand. My friend at Future TV, who, like every other ordinary Lebanese person I meet, is very friendly and polite and asks me to please not print his name in my article, appears to be depressed. "Did Hassan Nasrallah ever have an espresso at a café in Beirut?" he asks. "Did he ever go out to a restaurant and eat a steak?"

He and his wife are both Shia, he tells me, as he cleans his papers from his desk after another long night. Last Ashura, he was in his brand new car with his wife, and they were listening to Nasrallah give a speech over the radio. "He was talking about death," he explains. "He was asking, 'Have you ever heard of the last moments before death?' You have no idea how terrible these moments are. He was describing the very precise nature of this pain. His point was that the only way to die is as a martyr. He said, 'As you know, everyone dies. So why not choose to die as a martyr, and save yourself the pain of these awful moments between life and death?'"

In the silence of the empty TV studio, he stops for a minute before gathering his things. "I am driving my 2009 car, and this guy is telling me how to die better," he says quietly. "Two hours before I was talking with my financial adviser in Boston." He stops, and looks to see if I have the slightest idea of what it means to inhabit a world that has been torn into pieces, and is now being handed to a gang of bearded medievalists, backed by the bright promise of an Iranian nuclear bomb. "So, practically, you see, this is our problem." ♦

David Samuels is the author of ONLY LOVE CAN BREAK YOUR HEART and THE RUNNER: A TRUE ACCOUNT OF THE AMAZING LIES AND FANTASTICAL ADVENTURES OF THE IVY LEAGUE IMPOSTOR JAMES HOGUE.



Books & the Arts

STANLEY KAUFFMANN ON FILMS MYSTERY, HISTORY

CHILDREN DEEPEN one of the mysteries in film's being. It is mysterious enough that, since film's beginning, non-professional adults have given valuable film performances. Still, one can spin social and cultural explanations for this astonishment. But what about the performances by small children, children who were not child stars and who convinced millions? The list is too long to nibble at.

How can we explain them? How can we understand the mystery?

Some technical facts apply to children as well as adults. Film acting, unlike theater acting, is done in small bits, with the director unseen but present. Those bits can be repeated until—sometimes by accident, yet often by patent understanding—they are made to fit the mosaic of the whole. This process is often helpful for adults, and surely is even more so for children. But the child cannot have an adult's cognizance of film's place in the world or any real concept of fame or riches. He is probably out to please—the parent who is on the sidelines, the director who is coddling him. Yet, through all these conditions, he can make beauty. How? Why? Explanations, psychological or otherwise, go only so far until they meet mystery. Something happens beyond explanation. Even in professional adults, talent is ultimately inexplicable. A child's ability—not exactly talent—to reproduce truth is even more miraculous.

The mystery flowers again in a film from South Korea called *Treeless Mountain*.

The two leading characters are sisters, Jin and Bin, who are six and four. They are credible from our first glimpse, but they do not give what we can sensibly call performances. The writer-director—So Yong Kim, a young South Korean woman who has made one previous feature—has provided places for the sisters to dawdle,

to play, to cry, and to laugh: they, seemingly, do the rest. Just by being there. The story that Kim has written for them is full enough so that we can't say there is none, but essentially the picture merely provides reasons for us to look at them. The girls live in three different homes in the course of the film, and Kim simply lets those girls move and speak as much as possible in those three places. What enchants in this film is not only the way they act or react in emotional scenes: the pleasure is simply to be with two captivating little girls in all kinds of moments.

Bin and Jin live in Seoul with their mother, who has been abandoned by their father. She cares for them, but her mind is mostly on her husband. Very soon she takes her daughters to their aunt, who lives in a small dingy town, and leaves them there so that she can go looking for him. She asks Bin and Jin to put any small coins they get into a piggy bank they have, and she will return when it is full.

Big Aunt, as the girls call her, is helpful at first, but soon, without ever being cruel—this is not *Oliver Twist*—she treats them offhandedly. And it doesn't help that she drinks. During their stay with their aunt, the girls do the bit of make-believe from which the title derives. On a pile of rubble near where

they live, they stick a dead limb of a tree. It is the one symbol in the picture, this attempt to start life in barrenness, and it looks less and less necessary as the picture goes on.

Before long, the piggy bank fills up and their mother has not returned. Big Aunt can't deal with the girls any more and takes them to their grandparents, who live on a farm. Their grandmother embraces them and begins to teach them country ways of living. (We never see their grandfather, though we hear him once.) Nothing extraordinary happens. In time the girls get a loving letter from their mother delaying her return. Another use is found for the full piggy bank.

Kim tells us, in press material, that the girls did not know the content of each scene until they were about to do it. (They hadn't read the script, of course!) She spoke to them while they were actually shooting the scenes, reminding them, leading them, and she says that the most challenging part of the post-production work was editing her voice out of all the sound tracks.

But this only makes the girls all the more astonishing, because they never *obey*. They never seem to be doing what someone asked them to do. Whatever they say, wherever they move, it always seems to be something that just occurred to them. And all their responses to others, as often seems the case with small children, seem to interrupt thoughts of their own, which have been focused on a stick or a toy. They play with the small son of a neighbor of Big Aunt, they investigate grasshoppers with some boys, but they always seem to be primarily concerned with inner worlds of which our world is an interruption.

The girls' names are Hee Yeon Kim and Song Hee Kim (not actual sisters), but we may never see them again. If so, they join the multitude of children now forgotten who have mysteriously enriched film's past.



///
**TREELESS
MOUNTAIN**
OSCILLOSCOPE
LABORATORIES

IL DIVO
MUSIC BOX FILMS

I am not a parent, but I was jealous of their fathers for eighty-nine minutes. So Yong Kim has brought these girls to us with no trace of kiddy cuddle, with understanding and respect, and with a wonder that she enables us to share.

AT THE FURTHEST END of the film spectrum from *Treeless Mountain* comes *Il Divo*. It dazzles. It needs to, because the protagonist of this Italian biopic—not a documentary—is very reserved. He is Giulio Andreotti, who was prime minister in seven governments, who held other ministries, and who went through all of his political life and subsequent legal troubles with a deliberate unhistrionic persona. Andreotti is immediately interesting because of this contrast. (The title, which means “the god,” is a nickname he was given, which at first seems mockery but gradually seems less so.)

The director of this film, the exceptional Paolo Sorrentino, had long been fascinated by Andreotti. Still, he obviously knew there was a basic difficulty in this man as film protagonist. Andreotti is not cinematically colorful: therefore the film had to be. The result is overwhelming. Sorrentino envelops his taciturn hero in a scintillating texture, which at times even becomes witty. (Andreotti himself can be witty.) Here we have a politician who is small, round-shouldered, soft-voiced, composed, yet the film he inhabits is pyrotechnically brilliant. This dichotomy is doubled by the contrast within the man himself. He rules invisibly. We rarely see him do anything more than give quiet commands to aides: still, he has iron control. When a rival accuses him of not having imagination, he replies—quietly—that he may not have imagination, but he has archives. The response works.

The governmental dealings in the picture—Andreotti is a Christian Democrat—are not overly detailed and are not of much interest now in any case. They merely supply a context of political balletics. Two facts dominate. First, Andreotti was prime minister in 1978, when Aldo Moro was kidnapped, and his refusal to negotiate with the Red Brigades kidnappers led to Moro’s murder. Andreotti was riven but resolved. Second, toward the end of his career, he was indicted on criminal charges, including involvement in a homicide and close association with the Mafia. We never see any substantiation. Andreotti was convicted and subsequently acquitted. Even now he is on two governmental committees.

But all these issues, large though they loom, are not basic to the film. Sorren-

tino wanted to make a picture about typical political life, rivalries, cliques, flatteries, maneuvers, with an atypical protagonist, and he has done it superbly. We seem to enter a twentieth-century Renaissance court, crammed with egos and ambitions that are lubricated with lackey language, and at the hub is this taciturn god—all caught in a whirling fireworks of a film. The subject of political contrivance is hardly new, but I know no past example that treats it with such stylistic virtuosity.

Sorrentino’s prime rubric apparently was never to let the content or length of a scene dictate the way that he shot it. He insists on visual commentary throughout, rather than mere recording. The lighting is rarely realistic: it is almost always theatrical, like the later Fellini. The editing frequently juxtaposes oddities—for instance, a horse race and some killings. The speed within a scene is heightened by the way we look at it: press people run across a courtyard to a door that is opening, and the camera on a crane moves over them, heightening the urgency. Snatches of scenes are slipped in without explanation, simply as flashes of atmosphere. The music, by Teho Teardo, with some quotations from standard works, is not merely background: it reminds us that this film comes from the land of *verismo* opera.

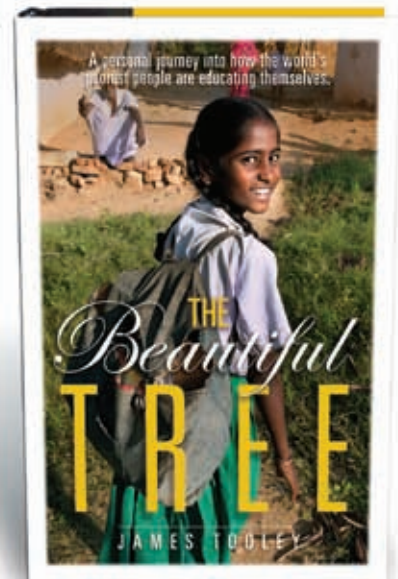
Was Andreotti’s career good or evil? The film often raises the question and never answers it firmly. Andreotti, in his own words (I assume), is pragmatic on the subject: results are what count, he says, and in his ministries he kept Italy active and present in the world. Then comes a revealing scene, a sudden plunge into the interior, like many soliloquies in Elizabethan plays. Andreotti, usually laconic and huddled, sits facing the camera, thus acknowledging it, and confesses to us—emotionally, climactically—what the quest for power and its maintenance have secretly meant to him. Toni Servillo, whose acting up to now has made Andreotti a coiled snake, carries off this scene in full-throated bravura fashion. It is the one moment in the picture when the acting matches the cinematic style.

This dynamic juncture of form and content illuminates—stunningly heightens—the difference between them elsewhere in the film. Further, it confirms that we are dealing here with a director who has more than talent: he has keen artistic intelligence. This is the fourth feature by Sorrentino, who is little known in this country. *Il Divo*, we can hope, will change that. ♦

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Dexter Filkins

SURGING AND AWAKENING

**THE GAMBLE:
GENERAL DAVID PETRAEUS AND THE
AMERICAN MILITARY ADVENTURE
IN IRAQ, 2006-2008**

By Thomas E. Ricks
(Penguin Press, 394 pp., \$27.95)

I.
FROM CENTRALITY to banality: perhaps no other event in modern American history has gone from being contentious to being forgotten as quickly as the war in Iraq. Remember the war? It consumed a trillion American dollars, devoured a hundred thousand Iraqi lives, squandered a country's reputation, and destroyed an American presidency. Given the retreat of the American press—the first American withdrawal from Iraq, you might say—one could almost be excused, in the spring of 2009, for forgetting that 140,000 American troops are still fighting and dying there.

That an undertaking as momentous and as costly as America's war in Iraq could vanish so quickly from the forefront of the national consciousness does not speak well of the United States in the early twenty-first century: not for its seriousness and not for its sense of responsibility. The American people, we are told, appear to be exhausted by the war in Iraq. But exhausted by what, exactly? Certainly not from fighting it. The fighting is done by kids from the towns between the coasts, not by any of the big shots who really matter. And they are not exhausted by paying for it, either: another generation will do that. No, when Americans say that they are tired of the war in Iraq, what they really mean is that they are tired of watching it on television, or of reading about it on the Internet. As entertainment, as Topic A, the agony has become a bore. "A car bomb exploded today in a crowded Baghdad marketplace, killing 53 and wounding 112." Click.

The irony of America's big tune-out lies in its timing. It has taken place during what has been the most dramatic phase of the six-year-long conflict—more precisely, during the reversal of the

war's fortunes. It is this reversal, this unexpected turnaround to the possibility of something less than a disastrous outcome, that has allowed so many Americans guiltlessly to forget about it. In the summer of 2006, remember, the war in Iraq was spiraling toward defeat, and the Middle East seemed to be headed toward a regional war. Two summers later, however, conditions on the ground were so normal, relatively speaking, that the citizens of the invading nation could feel secure enough to avert their gaze.

The two years between those summers are what really matter. America's military—exhausted, bled-out, half-broken—gathered itself and launched a great counteroffensive that arrested the slide and regained the initiative. The launching of that campaign, known as the surge, is the story of Thomas Ricks's important book. As Ricks makes clear, it is still too soon to know whether the surge will be as decisive in the long term as it has been in the short term. The war is not yet over; and the prospect of its conclusion will almost certainly provoke some violence by the various suicidal spoilers.

But the fact that the outcome of the war in Iraq is still up for grabs is perhaps the greatest irony of the surge's success. By stopping the slide toward cataclysm, the surge all but ensured an even longer American commitment to the people of Iraq. And, we might as well add, to the people of Afghanistan. America, take note: we are still in the middle of two terrible and complicated wars, and we are likely to be fighting them for many years to come, even if we lose.

THESE DAYS it is difficult to recall just how bad Iraq was in the nightmare year of 2006. The place had become a dystopian dream, a kind of laboratory of failure and inhumanity. Every morning, a hundred new corpses would appear in the streets, in garbage dumps, along the banks of the Tigris, many of them frozen in their final moments: hands bound, heads bagged, burned with acid, drilled with holes. The ethnic cleansing of Baghdad was galloping ahead, spurred on by the relentless suicide attacks on Shiite civilians and by the government-backed death squads that were pouring into the Sunni neighborhoods after sunset each day. Millions

of ordinary Iraqis were streaming from their homes to the country's borders, and to camps set up inside freshly cleansed neighborhoods that were now protected by sectarian gunmen.

There was no government to speak of in the summer of 2006. There was only anarchy and dread. In Baghdad, fifty people were being kidnapped every day, often by the police. Increasingly, the kidnappers' targets were children, fewer and fewer of whom were being allowed by their parents to venture outside. Once snatched, the victims were typically offered for sale to one of the many kidnapping gangs—or to the video-makers in Al Qaeda. There were places—the horse-racing track in the Baghdad neighborhood of Ameriya, for instance—where the dark auctions would unfold.

Standing amid the anarchy, I sometimes forgot that the violence in Iraq was not in fact random. It had specific purposes and specific causes. The violence in Iraq was never just a hysteria of ancient hatreds, unfocused and irrational, any more than it had been in Sarajevo. The violence in Iraq was planned to achieve particular ends, social and religious and political ends. Nothing seemed inevitable, except perhaps the country's eventual unraveling.

The horrifying state into which Iraq had fallen by the middle of 2006 was the product of certain policies, American and Iraqi. The lunatic wing of the Sunni insurgency—Al Qaeda and its like-minded soldiers—was bent on starting a full-scale sectarian war, believing it to offer their only hope of victory. To this end, the group unleashed waves of suicide attacks on Shiite civilians, hoping to provoke a backlash and a wider conflict. Increasingly, Al Qaeda took control of the Sunni insurgency, pushing out the more nationalist-minded groups, and portraying itself as the guardian of the country's embattled Sunni minority. Indeed, Al Qaeda was increasingly taking over all of Sunni society.

In the first two years of the war, the country's Shiite leadership had held its fire in the face of the Sunni onslaught. Then came the elections in December 2005, which brought to power the country's first Shiite-dominated government. The gloves came off. Iraq's new leaders, Nuri Al-Maliki and Abdul Aziz Hakim, were determined to crush the Sunni insurgency at any cost. Police and paramilitary units, now dominated by Shiite gunmen who moonlighted as militia-men, were turned loose in the Sunni neighborhoods, where they began, in late 2005, to carry out large-scale massa-

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cres of military-aged men. By early 2006, a civil war was well under way.

In the face of all this, the Americans, most crucially, decided to back away. From the summer of 2004 onward, the objective of the American strategy, which was formulated by General John Abizaid and General George Casey, was less the defeat of the Sunni insurgency than the training and equipping of the Iraqis to fight it for them. "As they stand up, we'll stand down," President Bush was fond of saying. By the middle of 2006, American soldiers were congregating, or more precisely isolating themselves, on large bases, with Burger Kings and Baskin-Robbins ice cream shops, only occasionally venturing into Iraq. Meanwhile the Iraqi security forces had grown in quantity if not in quality, and were taking over larger and larger pieces of the war. It was difficult, in the summer of 2006, to drive around Baghdad and find any American soldiers at all.

The trouble was that the strategy of Iraqification was manifestly failing, but the Bush administration, driven by domestic unhappiness and its own bull-headedness, kept pushing it anyway. Violence was not decreasing; it was increasing. American units were standing down before Iraqi units were ready (or willing) to fight for the Iraqi state. And Iraq's leaders were only too happy to have the Americans stand aside so that their gunmen could do the dirty work. "We know where these people live," Adel Abdul Mahdi, one of the Shiite vice-presidents, told me at the time, referring to the Sunni insurgents. "The Americans don't." The result, by the summer of 2006, was a nearly total collapse into chaos.

II.

FROM THE START of the American invasion of Iraq in March 2003, a relatively small group of American officers were convinced that the American military was prosecuting the war in a counter-productive way, and that, with a better approach, the war might still be won. At the beginning of the war, the American military had forgotten the experience of Vietnam (why don't the lessons of counter-insurgency warfare, or low-intensity warfare, or asymmetrical warfare, ever stick?) and was training for something resembling World War II. The generals never expected to fight a guerrilla insurgency in Iraq; and once it began, they concentrated almost entirely on killing and capturing insurgents. In practice, this typically meant surrounding Sunni villages and kicking down the doors of anyone suspected of fighting the

Americans, whether they were or not. The result was that the American strategy in the early years in Iraq succeeded not in reducing the number of insurgents but, by alienating Iraqi civilians, in producing new recruits.

Even in the early years, there were a number of American officers who rejected the kill-and-capture policy and went their own way. For them—General David Petraeus, Colonel H. R. McMaster, and others—the center of gravity in Iraq was not the insurgency but the Iraqis themselves. Protect them at all costs, nurture them, help them—above all, get out there in the streets with them—and the insurgents would wither away. And that meant, somewhat counter-intuitively, taking higher casualties.

Petraeus had done this in Mosul in 2003 and McMaster in Tal Afar in 2005, both to great effect. Even by late 2006, Petraeus and a small group of like-minded thinkers—most of whom were out of the military—believed that if they did everything right, they might be able to turn the Iraqi venture around. The remarkable thing—and the great drama of Ricks's thoroughly reported book—is that this small group of American insurgents actually succeeded in overthrowing the Army's leadership and executing an about-face in American strategy—and doing so in the nick of time, before the war in Iraq was lost. To read *The Gamble* is to be struck by just how close we came to losing. Petraeus and his colleagues gathered all the extra troops they could muster and gave the war one last shot, even though many of the same colleagues were not at all sure that their plan would work. "All in," Petraeus said many times. One of his aides used the poker metaphor a little differently: "We were dealt a really shitty hand."

For all of the dramatic developments in Iraq, perhaps the greatest drama was taking place in Washington. Petraeus and company were stepping forward with a last-gasp plan just as domestic political support for Bush was beginning to collapse. If necessity is the mother of invention, then desperation is the mother of radicalism. Bush—defying the generals, the Democrats, much of his own party, and a good chunk of the American people—decided to throw deep. Today, in the spring of 2009, it no longer really matters whether Bush was brilliant or stupid, a man who listened to reason or an idiot savant struck, Forrest Gump-like, by a fleeting insight. Whatever one's view of the war, it is impossible to deny that in the eleventh hour Bush was right. The gamble has worked, at least so far.

THE SURGE WORKED for a number of reasons, one of the biggest being luck. In fact, the word "surge" is a misnomer. When the White House finally endorsed the new plan, the Pentagon could only come up with about thirty thousand additional troops. That is a significant number, but it is not at all huge. It represented an increase of less than 20 percent in the number of American soldiers already deployed there. So how, then, did the surge work?

The chief reason for the new strategy's success was that all the American troops, not just the new ones, were deployed in a new and riskier way: directly into Iraqi neighborhoods, in small outposts. This put American soldiers among the Iraqis, who for years had been reluctant to cooperate with the Americans for fear of being killed by insurgents after the Americans went back to their bases. But this time the American soldiers were not pulling out. "You never give it up," Colonel Sean MacFarland, one of the most exceptional field commanders of the war, told Ricks.

Moreover, Petraeus and his deputy, General Raymond Odierno, proceeded on the assumption that most of the violence was being caused by small groups of Sunnis and Shiites, and not by the mass of Iraqis themselves. In the chaos, the generals saw a distinct pattern to the violence. On Monday, Sunni suicide bombers would murder scores of Shiite civilians. On Tuesday, the Shiite death squads, some in uniform, some allied with the provocative young cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, would pour into the Sunni neighborhoods to take their revenge. So if the cycle could be broken, if the suiciders could be stopped, then Iraq's Shiite majority might rid itself of the Shiite militias and the death squads.

But to achieve this goal, Petraeus and Odierno reasoned, there would have to be a lot of fighting first. The Americans had to fight their way back into neighborhoods and towns in and around Baghdad, some of which they had not been to in years. This combat was bloody, indeed. The early months of the surge, in the spring of 2007, were, for the Americans, the deadliest of the war.

And along the way—indeed, before the surge even got under way—the Americans got an extraordinary break. The insurgency in Iraq had always been a many-headed beast, with no overarching leadership. It included former Baathists, unemployed layabouts, and full-blown Islamist psychopaths. As the war dragged on, it was the murderous lunatics, most of them members of

Al Qaeda of Mesopotamia, who gained the upper hand. This was especially true in Anbar Province, the Wyoming-sized region that spans the Euphrates River west of Baghdad. Al Qaeda did not want merely to kill Americans; it harbored flamboyant visions of setting up a caliphate and provoking a full sectarian war. Al Qaeda's gunmen killed anyone—the traditional Sunni tribal leaders, for instance—who did not share their extreme goals.

But then, in late 2006, came the Sunni backlash. In Arabic, it was called *Al Sahwah*, or the Awakening. In some ways it was predictable, in some ways not. Squeezed by Al Qaeda on one side and the Shiite death squads on the other, the sheiks turned to—surprise!—the Americans to save them. The Awakening had nearly gotten going several times in the past, but it had always been snuffed out by Al Qaeda gunmen, who killed any sheiks who stepped forward. This time, under the adroit leadership of Colonel MacFarland, the Americans got there first. Months before the surge in Baghdad began, MacFarland had launched his own surge in Anbar Province, pulling his troops off the big bases and putting them in the middle of Ramadi, Anbar's capital, which lay in ruins. The determination shown by MacFarland prompted a sheik, Sittar Abu Risha, to step forward and make a deal on behalf of his tribe. This was a dazzling development. And MacFarland was ready to protect the arrangement: he parked an M-1 tank in front of Abu Risha's house.

"We're staying until we win this fight," MacFarland liked to say. And "more than anything else," he told Ricks, "that persuaded the sheiks that we were here to stay." And so the Awakening began. Soon MacFarland and other American officers were making the deals with sheiks across the Sunni heartland and into western Baghdad. This was possible in large part because Sunni Iraq is still a tribal society. Make a deal with the sheik—promise him security, hand him a bag of money—and he can plausibly deliver the rest of his tribe, even if, as was often the case, many members of that tribe had spent the past few years killing Americans.

Could the surge have worked without the Awakening? Ricks shows that this question is somewhat irrelevant, because it transpired that the two reinforced each other. The surge brought the security that allowed the sheiks to come forward, and the Awakening rapidly took thousands of potential enemies out of the war. In one of the most extraordinary scenes in the book—it is

almost cinematically stirring—a small tribe near Ramadi called Albu Soda, which had refused to join the Awakening, came under attack by a group of Al Qaeda gunmen. With the battle underway, a group of savvy American officers led by Captain Travis Patriquin began talking to the sheiks on their cell phones to offer their help. The sheiks quickly accepted. Captain Patriquin told the sheiks that the Americans could not tell who was Al Qaeda and who were members of Albu Soda, and so, in the heat of the battle, the captain and the sheik made a deal. The tribesmen climbed up on rooftops and waved towels over their heads, signaling that they were friendly—and the Americans bombed everyone else. A deal with the tribe was made shortly thereafter. (And soon afterward Captain Patriquin was killed.)

THE GAMBLE is mostly a book about American generals. The tale of the captain and the sheik notwithstanding, there is not a lot of the grit and grime of the streets in Ricks's pages, and there are not a lot of Iraqis in the book either. But Ricks's focus on the generals works well, because it allows him to capture the full scope of the drama that unfolded between 2006 and 2008. Still, sometimes *The Gamble* can be jarring when held up against *Fiasco*, Ricks's earlier book on the Iraq war. In keeping with the polarized debate of the time, *Fiasco* delivered sweeping judgments about America's officer corps, singling out a certain General Raymond Odierno as one of the villains. In 2003 and 2004, Odierno commanded the 4th Infantry Division in the Sunni Triangle, which earned a reputation for employing heavy-handed tactics and spurring the growth of the insurgency. In *Fiasco*, Odierno came off as something between a buffoon and a war criminal, all but wearing jack-boots as he turns his men loose across the Sunni Triangle.

In *The Gamble*, by contrast, Odierno is a hero. He is portrayed, very persuasively, as the principal intellectual force behind the surge inside the Pentagon, and once it was adopted he served as Petraeus's deputy commander in 2006 and 2007. (He replaced Petraeus as the overall commander in Iraq last fall.) So what happened to Odierno? Well, maybe he wasn't all that dumb in the first place. Odierno's men did indeed employ harsh tactics in 2003 and 2004, and those tactics did indeed backfire by alienating ordinary Iraqis. But I must report, from my own experience working in the Sunni Triangle in those awful days,

that it was not at all clear that anything else would have worked. Iraq's Sunnis had not been defeated by America's invasion; quite the contrary. They were preparing to fight.

III.

GIVEN THE astonishing bloodletting of 2005 and 2006, Iraq in the spring of 2009 is a remarkably calm place. Rescuing Iraq from the abyss was an epic achievement, and we owe Petraeus, Odierno, MacFarland, and the others a huge debt for dreaming it up and pulling it off. (Petraeus spent four entire years in Iraq before leaving in the fall of 2008.) But if Iraq is calm, it is not stable. It is, in fact, very fragile. The tens of thousands of Sunni gunmen who came on the government payroll as part of the Awakening regularly threaten to rejoin Al Qaeda. The Shiite-led government, wary of these former insurgents, appears eager to provoke them. The failure of all three of Iraq's major groups—Sunni, Shiite, Kurd—to reconcile in any meaningful way pushes ethnic and sectarian tensions constantly to the edge. Indeed, the Iraq that emerged from the war of 2003–2009 is an essentially shattered state: the Kurds seceding in every way but in name, the Sunnis inhabiting a dysfunctional strip along the Euphrates, the Shiites sitting astride a pro-Iranian authoritarian state.

This is not, in other words, something we can walk away from. That is Ricks's powerful point. What Petraeus and the other generals have ensured, by staving off defeat, is a longer war. How long? I do not know, but surely a lot longer than the debate in Washington would have you believe. "While there was an exit strategy," Ricks observes, "the exit was years away, in fact so far into the future that it is hard to discern."

President Obama's pronouncements on the war must therefore be read carefully. He has never said that America will leave Iraq by 2010. He has said only that American combat troops will leave. What is a combat troop? Well, you can bet it is not a military adviser, or a trainer, or a police mentor, or a special forces soldier, or a CIA paramilitary. Even under the best of circumstances, the Iraqi state will need many years to cohere again. Until that day, it seems unlikely that American soldiers will not be there by the tens of thousands, whoever the American president is. For this reason, the president may be a little divided against himself. His rhetoric of winding-down may be politically welcome, but may not be the best way to

ready the American people for what will likely be a very long commitment.

WHICH BRINGS US, finally, to Afghanistan. It is in Afghanistan, after all, that Obama has promised to re-engage and re-assert, and, as Bush did in Iraq, reverse the downward course of a war. The president has promised to dispatch an additional 21,000 troops to Afghanistan, and defense secretary Robert Gates, the hold-over from the Bush White House, has been busy defining downward what we might call victory.

What can be won in Afghanistan? Driving around the country, as I did recently, one is constantly overwhelmed by how little has been accomplished there. In December 2001, the country lay in ruins. Today, it is still pretty much the same place. Back then, the Taliban were scattered and broken; I remember walking through the caves of Tora Bora, just weeks after the Americans' ill-fated attempt to kill Osama bin Laden, and not feeling the least bit afraid. Today, Taliban fighters move freely across the countryside, and in some places they have set up a shadow government.

And then there is Pakistan, whose nightmarish qualities make its neighbor seem almost docile by comparison. Here, aided by elements of the Pakistani government itself, the Taliban have taken control of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), the vast area along the Afghan border, where they have allowed Al Qaeda to rebuild itself, and where they have developed a virtually untouchable base from which to mount attacks against American soldiers. What's more, the Taliban have begun marching east as well. With the capture of Swat Valley and the establishment of their harsh rule there, which was astoundingly ratified by a deal with the Zardari government, the Taliban are now a mere hundred miles from the Pakistani capital. Recall also that Pakistan, with a population of 175 million people, has several dozen nuclear warheads. That is the stuff of very dark movies.

So what is to be done? The first thing that should be said is that pulling out could have catastrophic consequences. Most of the available evidence suggests that if the Taliban were to return to power, Al Qaeda would return with them. Forget, too, about the military defeat of the Taliban in either country. As any American general will tell you, you cannot kill and

capture your way to victory in Afghanistan any more than you could in Iraq. (If you think you can, take a drive down any road outside the capital and count the rusting carcasses of Soviet tanks.)

One thing the Obama administration seems determined to do, and which seems plausible enough, is to make friends. In practice, this means flipping, protecting, and possibly even bribing individual Taliban commanders to come over to the other—that is, our—side. In the minds of American military commanders, this means, at least to some extent, duplicating the experience of the Sunni Awakening in Iraq. American officers have already begun reaching out to Afghan tribal elders, and in Wardak Province they have begun trying to set up local militias that might help them in the fight against the Taliban.

The good news about the prospects of an Afghan Awakening is that there are probably a fair number of Taliban to be flipped. War in Pakistan and Afghanistan is not like war anywhere else in the world. Men fight, men change sides, men fight again. In fact, much of the initial success of the invasion in 2001 was owed to our turning and often bribing Taliban commanders, sometimes with astonishing results. In November 2001, when the war was little more than a month old, I stood at the outskirts of the city of Kunduz, where thousands of Taliban and Al Qaeda fighters had been encircled, and watched as Taliban fighters drove out of the city in their Toyota Hilux trucks to defect to the army of the Northern Alliance. The Taliban gunmen were literally embraced and kissed by the Northern Alliance fighters as they climbed out of their trucks. Some of the turncoats went into battle against the remaining Taliban the very next day.

Still, it is hardly as easy as all that. There are limits to how many of the Taliban might be amenable to this kind of co-optation. And where in Iraq the insurgents were part of a tribal society, in the Pashtun areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan the old tribal networks have been decimated by years of war. In many places, the Taliban have largely supplanted them. It is

important to understand that in many respects the Taliban phenomenon represents a social revolution: the turbaned fighter as Robin Hood. After thirty years of war, Pashtun society, on both sides of the border, is atomized and broken.

Since taking office, Obama and his advisers have set about lowering their sights

for the region, to the point that the overriding objective appears to be to stop Al Qaeda from attacking Europe or the United States. It seems like a purely military approach, based only on the requirements of American security. But the deep question is to what extent the requirements of American security demand more than a purely military approach—to what extent a successful military strategy must rest on social transformation, on nation-building. Obama seems to have concluded that we must engage in flat-out nation-building on both sides of the border. The reason for this is simple enough: without creating strong and stable states in both countries, stopping Al Qaeda will likely be impossible. In this respect, we probably should not expect a dramatic revision of Bush's strategic principles in Afghanistan. We may expect, rather, a more robust implementation of them. And the turnaround in Iraq provides an instructive example. It may have taken six years and \$1 trillion, but in Iraq the Americans built a state. Iraqi police, soldiers, and security forces number about 600,000: a sure sign of a state. That is a mass—something that the insurgents could join.

In Afghanistan, there is nothing like this. After eight years of neglect, the Afghan state is a weak and pathetic thing. It is not for nothing that President Karzai's nickname is "the mayor of Kabul." At the city limits, his writ ends. Across the border, in FATA, there is almost nothing at all. To this end, the Obama administration plans massively to boost economic development aid in Pakistan, and it is planning on doing the same in Afghanistan. Most significantly, the new administration has promised to increase the size of the Afghan army from its current level of 90,000 to some yet-to-be-determined number—probably in the neighborhood of 240,000.

This is impressive, but the question today in Afghanistan and Pakistan is whether this is really enough. Only 21,000 additional American troops to rebuild Afghanistan? Again, Ricks's book is instructive. When American military officers launched the surge in Iraq, many of them were deeply skeptical about its chances for success. They tried it anyway, and it worked. And so in Afghanistan, too, we are going to try. But we must beware of facile analogies about surges and awakenings. It is a different world in South Asia. The war in Afghanistan is in its eighth year. Every day Pakistan lurches closer to collapse. Obama's proposals may be too late. Failure is always an option. ♦



John Banville

THE WORD-STORMER

THE LETTERS OF SAMUEL BECKETT, 1929-1940

Edited by Martha Dow Fehsenfeld
and Lois More Overbeck
(Cambridge University Press,
782 pp., \$50)

I.

IF SAMUEL BECKETT was a recluse, as most of the world liked to think, then he was surely the most garrulous recluse ever. He had a wide circle of friends, many of them close, and a very much wider circle of acquaintances, especially after he began to work in the theater, which he did partly, as he said, to escape the tyranny of prose, but also, as he did not say, for company. He liked Paris restaurants, his favorite of which for many years was the beautifully named *Closerie des Lilas*, and enjoyed late-night drinking with his pals. I once asked a person who had been close to him in his later years if Beckett drank a lot, and after a pause came the judicious reply, "Well, he went on benders, you know." There is a record of him sitting in a Left Bank bar one night and suddenly emptying a full glass of beer over his own head, though admittedly this might seem evidence less of bibulous high spirits than of mental stress.

In his lifetime he wrote some fifteen thousand letters—at least that is the number his relentlessly zealous editors have managed to track down and make their selection from—most of them by hand, to a wide circle of correspondents. If all this concentric circling smacks a little of Dante, then it is apt, for Beckett had a very high regard for the dour Florentine and may even have modeled himself on him. Certainly he saw himself as a Dantesque lost spirit, and chose to name his earliest fictional alter ego Belacqua, after one of the more listless characters in the *Purgatorio*. Beckett's biographers too present the impression of a figure immured in indolent suffering, beset by all manner of cysts, boils, ulcers, and anal complaints, insomnia, assorted digestive disorders, depression—of course—and what he rather mysteriously referred to as "the old internal combustion heart," all of which ailments, according to bio-

graphical evidence, he listed in detail and described with mournful gusto for the delectation of his many correspondents.

Alas, though, not for ours. Beckett was notorious for the unhelpfulness of the help that he offered to his biographers and editors. When Deirdre Bair approached him to ask if he would permit her to write his life—her *Samuel Beckett: A Biography* was eventually published in 1978—he told her he would "neither help nor hinder" her, a typically ambiguous assurance which the redoubtable Bair seemed to take as nothing short of an encouraging shove between the shoulder blades. When he appointed Martha Dow Fehsenfeld as editor and Lois More Overbeck as associate editor of an edition of his correspondence, he stipulated that they should publish from the letters "those passages only having bearing on my work." At first sight it seems a simple or at least straightforward directive, but of course it was neither, as the editors soon learned to what was evidently their chagrin.

The result is that we have in this collection no letters from Beckett to his mother, a key figure in his life, or to his much-loved father or to his brother Frank, whom he was very close to, or to Peggy Sinclair, his first cousin and, it seems, his first love. Also, in the letters that we are offered there are a number of suppressed passages, and, readerly prurience being what it is, one finds oneself pausing in frustrated speculation over each ellipsis. Probably behind every "[...]" there is nothing more revealing than news of another plague of boils, but one does keenly wish to know.

We should address first things first—though our subject would no doubt recommend last things last; so let us get the scholarly apparatus out of the way, for it is an ungainly contraption. Here then, in brief, in more than brief, is the tangled history of the project which the editors tell us is known as "The Correspondence of Samuel Beckett," although the publication is called *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*—this is one of a number of odd nonsequiturs that crop up in Fehsenfeld's and Overbeck's guarded, not to say defensive, introduction to this, the first of four projected big volumes. In 1985, perhaps fearing the attentions of another delver into his life and work whom he would have to neither help nor hinder,

Beckett decided that an edition of his letters should be published. To this end he appointed his American publisher and friend Barney Rosset as general editor, with Fehsenfeld and Overbeck—do they not sound like a pair of minor characters from Beckett's earlier, more rambunctious fictions?—as editor and associate editor, respectively. He had met Fehsenfeld in 1976 when she was co-writing a book on his work in the theater, and now he gave her written authorization to consult his letters and to take copies of "such passages as are relevant to her research." Later he wrote to her a short letter, which she quotes, and which contains the passage which no doubt has already set the leaves to quivering in the Beckett arboretum within the groves of academe: "I do have confidence in you & know that I can rely on you to edit my correspondence in the sense agreed on with Barney [Rosset], i.e. its reduction to those passages only having bearing on my work."

Within weeks of the contract being signed, Grove Press was sold to Weidenfeld and Getty, and a year later Rosset was "released from his position," as the editors delicately put it, and began a legal action against the company. Undaunted, Fehsenfeld and Overbeck continued to work on the letters. In 1996 what had been Grove Press agreed to re-assign the rights, at which point Cambridge University Press entered what by then surely might be described as the fray. Negotiations between Cambridge and Beckett's literary executor, his fiercely protective French publisher Jérôme Lindon, began in earnest in 1999. "Deliberations proved complex," the editors note, "not least because of radically differing interpretations of what Samuel Beckett, now dead ten years, would have wished from an edition 'only having bearing on my work.'" One distinctly detects the sound of skin and hair flying. Lindon wanted to restrict publication to those letters "in which there was specific mention of individual works or of his *oeuvre*," which surely would have made for a slim and arid volume. Lindon died in 2001, and Beckett's nephew Edward took over the literary executorship. In 2003 Barney Rosset released the original contract, which was then re-assigned to Cambridge. "Protracted discussion was still necessary before a formal contract was eventually signed among the various parties in November 2005." Phew.

NO DOUBT all this editorial kerfuffle will be of no more than incidental interest to the general reader, although frankly it is hard to imagine many general readers venturing

John Banville's novel *THE INFINITIES* (Picador) will be published in the fall.

far into this volume, which from the outset throws up a thicket of scholarly defenses against the non-specialist. The editors are not to be faulted for this: they have done their subject proud. Beckett was the most erudite of all the modernists, and certainly the most widely read among them—even Joyce, who burned many a barrel of midnight oil, could not compete with his erstwhile acolyte in the scholarship stakes. The letters, Fehsenfeld and Overbeck write, “demonstrate [Beckett’s] numerous commitments: to reading in a systematic way the classics as well as the literatures of several cultures; to training himself in music and the visual arts; to learning languages, becoming fluent in at least five and familiar with many more.”

Add to all this the fact that Beckett, especially in the years covered by this volume, moved in a milieu now largely vanished, and the scale of the task facing the editors becomes apparent. They tell us that in the early stages of the editorial process Beckett told them, “Please, no commentary,” to which they responded, “Not commentary, but there must be context.” With almost endearing disingenuousness they say that in editing the two and a half thousand or so letters selected from the much larger total, they “have tended toward the ‘minimalist’ approach to annotation, although, because of the very complex nature of the material, at times it may not seem so.” All the same, the notes take up a goodly portion of the book, and while they are admirably exhaustive, they are at times exhausting, too. As always with Beckett a certain word-weariness is inevitable.

II.

WHO IS THE person that emerges from this initial volume of letters? Samuel Barclay Beckett was born in Foxrock, a well-to-do suburb of Dublin, on Good Friday, April 13, 1906. His birth certificate records the date as May 13, which has led some commentators to believe that Beckett was lying about the correct date in order to invest the moment of his entry into “this bitch of a world” with the spurious portentousness of religious and superstitious connotations. But James Knowlson, in *Damned to Fame*, his superb and definitive biography of Beckett, verified the Good Friday date by the simple expedient of checking the Births and Deaths column of *The Irish Times*.

The Becketts, of Huguenot descent, were a prosperous Protestant family who had their money from the building

trade. They and the few other families with whom they associated were hardy, assured, comfortable members of the professional middle class; they were survivors who would successfully weather the storms of revolution and civil war that battered the country in the first twenty-five years of the twentieth century. Writing of the caste to which Beckett, whether he liked it or not, belonged, the Irish critic Vivian Mercier is perceptive:

The males and some of the females of the typical Protestant family took the train every weekday to office, school or university in Dublin. In all these places they were likely to be associating almost exclusively with fellow Protestants. The



Samuel Beckett, early 1930s

females who stayed at home spent their leisure time with other Protestant ladies, though their maids and gardeners were usually Catholic. If one preferred to think of oneself as English there was really no reason not to.

The house in which Beckett was born, Cooldrinagh, was a spacious edifice standing on its own ample grounds. Life there was comfortable, ordered, and stultifying, and Beckett had a sheltered and happy, or at least not unhappy, childhood. He attended Portora Royal School in County Fermanagh in what was to become, after partition in 1920, Northern Ireland; Oscar Wilde had also been a pupil there, a fact not much boasted of by the school authorities in those strait-laced times. From

Portora he made the natural progression to Trinity College, Dublin, where his main interest was French literature, from the Troubadors to the Moderns.

At Trinity he studied under Thomas Rudmose-Brown, professor of Romance languages. Beckett was much favored by “Ruddy,” who brought a whiff of *luxe et volupté*—if not much *calme*, as he seems to have been an excitable fellow—to the sober corridors of Trinity; he was also a serious scholarly and literary influence on Beckett, whom he introduced to modern French authors such as Proust and Gide. Beckett immersed himself in the French masters, especially Racine, an enthusiasm that would register strongly later on in his own work for the stage. He also read widely in Italian literature and in the great German philosophers, finding Schopenhauer particularly congenial, which is hardly a surprise.

In the summer holidays he traveled for long periods in France, and also in Germany and Italy, where in the great galleries he could indulge his enthusiasm for painting, especially that of the Dutch Old Masters. It is clear from Beckett’s letters to his friend Thomas McGreevy, the Irish poet and academic who was later to become director of the National Gallery of Ireland, that he could have been one of the finest art critics of the age. It should be remembered, however, that the majority of letters in this volume are to McGreevy, so there is a disproportionate emphasis throughout the volume on the art of painting. Also, despite his love of the old painters, Beckett had begun to develop deep misgivings about the very possibility of an art made according to the old and—according to him—outmoded conventions. James Knowlson pointed to a telling passage in a letter that now appears in this volume, which the twenty-eight-year-old Beckett wrote to McGreevy in 1934:

... what I feel in Cézanne is precisely the absence of a rapport that was all right for [Salvator] Rosa or [Salomon van] Ruysdael for whom the animising mode was valid, but would have been false for him, because he had the sense of his incommensurability not only with life of such a different order as landscape but even with life of his own order, even with the life—one feels looking at the self-portrait in the Tate, not the Cézanne chauve with the big hat—operative in himself.

In 1928, the year before the present volume opens, Beckett secured a tempo-

rary teaching post in Paris at the École Normale Supérieure, where Thomas McGreevy was his predecessor in the job. It was McGreevy who introduced Beckett to James Joyce and his circle. Beckett returned from Paris to Dublin in 1930 to take up a lectureship at Trinity College. He was not happy in Ireland, to say the least, finding Dublin life suffocating and the tensions with his mother unbearable. He left Trinity precipitately, traveled in Germany, tried to live in Paris and in London. Then in 1932, broke and dispirited, he had to “crawl home,” as he said, and throw himself on the mercies of his family once again.

Beckett’s mother, May, was a loving though stern woman, brooding and given to unpredictable fits of anger followed by lengthy bouts of depression, traits that roughened the tranquil life

of Cooldrinagh while Beckett was living there and most of which she bequeathed to her youngest son. Like so many Irishmen, Beckett was deeply attached to his mother—“I am what her savage loving has made me”—in a classic love-hate relationship that was to endure long after her death; his later decision to settle permanently in France, and to write in French, seemed as much a flight from the mother as from the motherland.

In the autumn of 1937, May Beckett and her son had a severe falling out, for reasons unclear, after which Beckett left the house, never to live there again. Mind, he was thirty-one, so it was high time he broke the umbilical cord. He wrote to McGreevy that “the grotesque can go no further. It is like after a long forenoon of the thumb screws being commanded by the bourreau [torturer] to play his favourite song without words with feeling. . . . And if a telegram came now to say she was dead, I would not do the Furies the favour of regarding myself even as indirectly responsible.” But the debt to his mother is everywhere obvious in his work. In the same letter he writes: “I have been sleeping here since Mother left. I do not know where she is or how long she will be away. . . . I have been going through my papers & trying to get my books into some kind of order,” which we might compare interestingly with the opening sentences of *Molloy*: “I am in my mother’s room. It’s I who live there now. I don’t know how I got there.”

Beckett’s father, Bill, a bluff, vigorous, and kindly man, was a surveyor with offices in Clare Street near the back gate of Trinity College. Beckett loved him dearly, and spent many happy hours with him tramping the roads of Foxrock and environs and bathing in the Forty Foot swimming place at Sandycove, under the shadow of Joyce’s Martello Tower. The father, like the mother, figures throughout the son’s work, emblematic of loss, of constraint, of mortality, and of the power and limits of love. In the summer of 1933, Bill Beckett suffered a serious heart attack. Beckett wrote to McGreevy:

He was in his sixty-first year, but how much younger he seemed and was. Joking and swearing at the doctors as long as he had breath. He lay in the bed . . . making great oaths that when he got better he would never do a stroke of work. He would drive to the top of Howth and lie in the bracken and fart. His last words were “Fight fight fight” and “What a morning.” All the little things come back—mémoire de l’escalier.

I can’t write about him, I can only walk the fields and climb the ditches after him.

Some months after his father’s death Beckett had a devastating nervous collapse, and went to London where on the advice of his old school friend Geoffrey Thompson, a doctor with an interest in mental problems, he submitted to a course of psychotherapy at the Tavistock Clinic under the Kleinian psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion. This treatment, financed by his mother, was to last for two years. Too much can be made of the episode, but it is impossible not to see the marks of it in Beckett’s subsequent work, so much of which is cast in the form of a monologue in which a speaker, often lying on his back in dimness or dark, gabbles in a kind of delirium of doubt and self-seeking to a faceless auditor.

IN THOSE DAYS Beckett, like any sensitive youngish person but more so, was desperately in search of a spiritual way that would lead him out of himself. McGreevy, a devout Catholic, recommended Thomas à Kempis’s *Imitation of Christ* as a guiding text, but Beckett had already been down that dead end. In the *Imitation*, he writes in a letter in 1935, he had found things that “went to confirm & reinforce my own way of living, a way of living that tried to be a solution & failed.” All he could take from Kempis was “an abject self-referring quietism . . . the only kind that I, who seem never to have had the least faculty or disposition for the supernatural, could elicit from the text.” And he continues:

I cannot see how “goodness” is to be made a foundation or a beginning of anything. Am I to set my teeth and be disinterested? When I cannot answer for myself, and do not dispose of myself, how can I serve? Will the demon . . . disable me any the less with sweats & shudders & panics & rages & rigors & heart burstings because my motives are unselfish & the welfare of others my concern? . . . Or is there some way of devoting pain & monstrosity & incapacitation to the service of a deserving cause? Is one to insist on a crucifixion for which there is no demand?

This was not a happy man.

In London, Beckett considered a number of possible day jobs, toying with the notion of becoming an airline pilot or—wait for it—an advertising copy writer. (There is food for a dinner-party game, devising the jingles that Beckett might

Perfect Repose

Turning so effortlessly you wouldn’t
call it that, what they do,
sliding easily over,

a kind of effortless
oscillation, on their sides,
most of them, floating together

in their troop,
perhaps twenty-five of them
just off the pier, though

you couldn’t count them,
the sea-lions: they curve around
one another, two break away,

one joins, the group drifts
with the tide. Whose flipper
or tail raised to the sun,

whose head lifted out of the green?
They lie a little beneath
the surface, now and then

turning the face up to breathe,
which is suddenly how you know
they’re asleep: simultaneous,

intimate, soft plosive, a little wet,
and though one coughs now and then
—water in the nose?—

the single thing they make of many,
still and always moving,
as if air were also a wave

now arrived at the drifting shore of—
what pronoun? I mean *thou*
all breathe in again at once.

MARK DOTY

have thought up for washing powder or diapers.) At last, the psychoanalysis at an end, he went back to Ireland, from where he made a number of escapes to the Continent, notably in 1936–1937, when he traveled extensively in Germany. Low in spirits as well as in funds, he trailed from one city to the next using art galleries as a sort of stepping stones. Then, in 1937, his roaming done for the present, he returned to Paris, where he was to live for the rest of his life.

He carried on a precarious existence in France. His first novel, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, a chaotic ragbag packed with abstruse learning and laborious juvenile humor, was rejected by scores of publishers before its author wisely put it away and went on to other projects. His second novel, *Murphy*, a comic tour de force and his first substantial artistic achievement, also met with little success; although he managed to get it published in London, it sold hardly at all. Short pieces appeared in the English-language magazines, such as *Transition*, which flourished in Paris at the time. Despite poverty and a propensity to melancholy—as the narrator of *From an Abandoned Work* says, “an unhappiness like mine, there’s no annihilating that”—Beckett in those years lived the not-uncongenial life of the artistic expatriate, eating and drinking in the bars of Montparnasse and spending much time in the merry surroundings of the quarter’s numerous brothels.

He wrote poems—opaque miniatures, mostly—and short stories and criticism, including a little book on Proust. He enjoyed an energetic love life, and, according to Knowlson, for a period toward the close of the 1930s was carrying on three simultaneous affairs: famously, with Peggy Guggenheim; intriguingly, with Mrs. Adrienne Bethell, an Irish antique-shop owner holidaying in Paris; and with Suzanne Deschevaux-Dumesnil, who was to be his companion for life, and whom eventually he married. We learn about these romances from the biographies, but they figure hardly at all in the letters. For all his predilection for school-boy humor, Beckett was admirably discreet in the matter of *l’amour*.

IT IS FITTING that the first letter printed here, written when he was not yet twenty-three, is to James Joyce, and deals with the presentation of the essay “Dante ... Bruno, Vico ... Joyce,” Beckett’s contribution to *Our Examination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress*, a collection of essays instigated by the old artificer himself to pave the way for what was to be-

come *Finnegans Wake*. The young Beckett was a strong admirer of Joyce’s work, although it is apparent from his many dry, not to say sardonic, references to “the Penman,” as Beckett called him, that he had the measure of Joyce’s manipulateness and personal coldness. In 1937, when he was doing editorial work on the *Wake*, he wrote to McGreevy: “Joyce paid me 250 fr. for about 15 hrs. work on his proofs. That is needless to say only for your ear. He then supplemented it with an old overcoat and 5 ties! I did not refuse. It is so much simpler to be hurt than to hurt.”

There could be no better illustration of the dissimilarity between the two men than this little incident. Although Beckett’s ambitions were no less grand than those that Joyce had entertained when he was in his twenties, Beckett had none of the older master’s ruthlessness and cunning when it came to promoting his own work and reputation. The place of Joyce in Beckett’s life is a matter of some disagreement among his biographers. Deirdre Bair held that Beckett regarded Joyce as a godlike figure, to be slavishly imitated in everything from shoe size to prose style; but Anthony Cronin, in *Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist*, considered Joyce a thoroughgoing cad from whose clutches Beckett was relieved to escape. Knowlson, in *Damned to Fame*, portrays Joyce as both a monster of ego and a solicitous friend whom Beckett revered as an artist but about whose character he was both clear-eyed and forgiving.

There was an added awkwardness between the two men over the fact that Joyce’s mentally troubled daughter Lucia developed a fondness for Beckett that he was unable to reciprocate. He makes few mentions of Lucia in the letters, and those few only indicate his discomfort with the situation. Writing to McGreevy in 1937 about tensions with Joyce—his delay in writing the essay on *Finnegans Wake* was causing trouble—Beckett said that if there were to be a break with the Joyces, “at least this time it won’t be about their daughter, who by the way as far as I can learn gets deeper & deeper into the misery & less & less likely ever to emerge.” Yet after Beckett was stabbed in a Paris street by a pimp on Twelfth Night in 1938—a very Beckettian incident, fraught with gruesome comedy—Joyce was “incredibly good” to the wounded man, paying for a private hospital room and supplying him with a reading lamp, while Nora Joyce cooked him a custard pudding. No one needed mothering more than Sam Beckett.

Joyce’s example as a dedicated artist and maker of “the new,” in Ezra Pound’s

formulation, was immensely important for Beckett—but he had his own road to follow, a narrow way that diverged sharply from the broad Joycean thoroughfare. The single most significant letter in this volume is the one written, in German, in the summer of 1937, from Dublin, to the publisher and translator Axel Kaun, in which Beckett sets out in stark terms his negative aesthetic. Asking rhetorically if literature alone is to be “left behind on that old, foul road long ago abandoned by music and painting,” and commending Beethoven’s Seventh Symphony in which “for pages on end we cannot perceive it as other than a dizzying path of sounds connecting unfathomable chasms of silence,” Beckett makes a declaration that deserves to be quoted at length:

It is indeed getting more and more difficult, even pointless, for me to write in formal English. And more and more my language appears to me like a veil which one has to tear apart in order to get to those things (or the nothingness) lying behind it. Grammar and style! To me they seem to have become as irrelevant as a Biedermeier bathing suit or the imperturbability of a gentleman. A mask. It is to be hoped the time will come, thank God, in some circles it already has, when language is best used where it is most efficiently abused. Since we cannot dismiss it all at once, at least we do not want to leave anything undone that may contribute to its disrepute. To drill one hole after another into it until that which lurks behind, be it something or nothing, starts seeping through—I cannot imagine a higher goal for today’s writer.

Strong stuff, certainly; and, for all its vaunting of the “whispering of the end-music or of the silence underlying all,” remarkable for volume and range as a battle cry of the avant garde. Even Joyce is to be left in the rear of this advance: “In my opinion, the most recent work of

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Joyce had nothing at all to do with such a programme. There it seems much more a program of the apotheosis of the word.”

Crouching for more than a century under the bombardment of fundamentalist modernism, we long ago hoisted the white flag; yet reading again this famous manifesto from the party of the Nothing, one is driven to ask, however timidly, the simple question: why? Why are grammar and style irrelevant, and what is it they are irrelevant to? Why is language “best used where it is most efficiently abused”? Why should we contribute to the disrepute of language as the next best thing to dismissing it altogether?

The late Cyril Cusack, a wonderful actor but a rebarbative spirit, used to recount a meeting with Beckett about a possible production of *Waiting for Godot* in which Cusack told the author that the play is nothing more than a moan of Protestant angst. Beckett, according to Cusack, agreed immediately to this curt analysis. One does not doubt Beckett’s artistic probity—probity was what he said he admired most in Joyce—but the ferocity of his aesthetic gives one pause. Like all artists, Beckett sought impersonality but suffused his work with the squid

ink of his own desires, fears, and prejudices. He professed to have veered from the “old, foul road” down which language must drag itself, but is it not possible that what he was turning from was precisely his love of language, a luxury that his ascetic soul felt obliged to spurn?

As Cusack saw clearly, Beckett was very much an Anglo-Irish Protestant, whose language resonates—“like a verse of Isaiah, or of Jeremiah,” as his narrator Molloy has it—as if in a bleak homily mumbled from the pulpit of a bare three-quarters-empty church. He wrote in French, as he said, *pour écrire sans style*, but Christopher Ricks has rightly pointed out that his French is as formal and correct as that of a scholarship boy, while his English lives and breathes vitality. *Imagination Dead Imagine* is the title of one of his late pieces, but the point is that the Beckettian imagination continued lively to the very end. In that letter to Axel Kaun he placed himself on “the road toward this, for me, very desirable literature of the non-word,” but a few lines later he states his program with a contrary succinctness: “Word-storming in the name of beauty.” *The Letters of Samuel Beckett 1929–1940* is a preliminary record of that storm. ♦

the tone, the syntax, and the music are entirely straightforward. Compared to a nineteenth-century English lyric, this eighth-century Chinese poem sounds modern. “The Jewel Stairs’ Grievance” shows how perfectly Li Po met Pound’s modernist criteria of directness and imagistic precision.

Yet Pound was also aware that the Chinese poet’s concision was licensed by a complex of implications and conventions that the modern reader could not be trusted to know. And so he thought it necessary to append to his translation a note that was longer than the poem itself: “Jewel stairs, therefore a palace. Grievance, therefore there is something to complain of. Gauze stockings, therefore a court lady, not a servant who complains. Clear autumn, therefore he has no excuse on account of the weather. Also she has come early, for the dew has not merely whitened the stairs, but has soaked her stockings. The poem is especially prized because she utters no direct reproach.”

ALMOST a century later, it is possible for English speakers to read much more widely and deeply in Chinese poetry, and in more accurate versions, thanks to several generations of erudite and talented poet-translators, from Arthur Waley to Kenneth Rexroth to A. C. Graham. A scholar-translator such as David Hinton, whose new anthology forms the capstone to a long and productive career, certainly knows infinitely more about Chinese language, culture, and literature than Pound ever did. In addition to his many volumes of translations of individual poets—including Li Po, Tu Fu, and Wang Wei, the three greatest poets of the T’ang Dynasty—Hinton has brought into English the classics of Chinese philosophy.

But the striking thing is that Hinton’s version of what he calls “Jade-Staircase Grievance” is not very different from Pound’s:

Night long on the jade staircase, white
dew appears, soaks through gauze
stockings.
She lets down crystalline blinds,
gazes out
through jewel lacework at the autumn
moon.

And it is doubtful whether Hinton’s readers are any better prepared than Pound’s were to encounter the deeply attractive, and profoundly alien, aesthetics of Chinese poetry. For while many readers of poetry now have an idea of what they think Chinese poetry in translation should

Adam Kirsch

DISTURBANCES OF PEACE

CLASSICAL CHINESE POETRY: AN ANTHOLOGY

Translated and edited by David Hinton
(Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 475 pp., \$45)

DU FU: A LIFE IN POETRY

Translated by David Young
(Knopf, 226 pp., \$16.95)

THE OLDEST poems translated in David Hinton’s magnificent anthology *Classical Chinese Poetry* date to the fifteenth century B.C.E., long before the Bible was written. For the English-speaking world, however, this ancient art is effectively less than a hundred years old. Chinese poetry in English was born in 1913, when the widow of Ernest Fenollosa, an American professor who taught at the University of Tokyo, sent Ezra Pound a bundle of her late husband’s notes on Chinese poetry. Fenollosa, who went to Japan to teach philosophy and economics, did not speak any Chinese; he studied these classic texts with Japanese tutors, but needed an interpreter to talk with them. By the

time Pound, who knew neither Chinese nor Japanese, transformed Fenollosa’s notes into the poems published in *Cathay*, his slim volume of 1915, he was thus at least four steps removed from the original Chinese. Yet English speakers knew so little about Chinese poetry that Pound’s versions, however approximate, carried the authority of originals. In a sense, they were originals: as Eliot remarked, Pound was “the inventor of Chinese poetry for our time.”

Inventing Chinese poetry meant not just translating it, but also teaching people how to read it. Here is Pound’s translation of a poem by Li Po, which he titled “The Jewel Stairs’ Grievance”:

The jeweled steps are already quite
white with dew,
It is so late that the dew soaks my
gauze stockings,
And I let down the crystal curtain
And watch the moon through the
clear autumn.

The properties of the poem are exotic, but

sound like, we have almost no sense at all of what Chinese poetry actually is. The reason is simple and quite insurmountable. It is that so many of the features of the Chinese language, which poets manipulate in complex and subtle ways, are totally untranslatable into English.

The ideograms, which Pound turned into an obsession, that make up some (though far from all) Chinese characters; the very notion of words as single characters, rather than permutations of an alphabet; the tones that determine the meaning of words, and whose patterning is a central element of Chinese verse; the attenuation or absence of many features of English grammar, including pronouns and tenses—all these factors make it impossible for the reader of an English translation to have any accurate sense of how a Chinese poem sounds, moves, and feels to a Chinese reader.

And beyond the linguistic barrier between us and the Chinese poets lie the barriers of literary convention and historical background. The T'ang Dynasty poets, who lived during the golden age of Chinese civilization in the eighth and ninth centuries C.E., belonged to and wrote for an extremely sophisticated audience, most of whom were officials in the imperial government: the original mandarins. Reading commentaries on Chinese poetry—notably, Stephen Owen's *The Great Age of Chinese Poetry*, which deals with the High T'ang period of Li Po and Tu Fu—one begins to get an inkling of how many layers of meaning even the simplest, most imagistic poem contained for its original readers. Each genre of Chinese poetry had rules about rhyme, line length, and parallelism so intricate as to make the English sonnet look like free verse. Then there were conventions about how poems should start and end, and what register of formality was appropriate to different subjects and different readers.

Li Po, for instance, was known as a shockingly original poet, and it is easy for any reader of his poems about the joys of drunkenness to see that there is something cheerfully subversive about his persona. Consider these lines from Hinton's version of one of Li Po's most famous poems, "Drinking Alone Beneath the Moon":

Among the blossoms, a single jar of wine.
No one else here, I ladle it out myself.

Raising my cup, I toast the bright moon,
and facing my shadow makes friends
three,

though moon has never understood
wine,
and shadow only trails along behind me.

I sing, and moon rocks back and forth;
I dance, and shadow tumbles into pieces.

This is clearly enough a poem against decorum, though it is hard to gauge just



Attributed to Li Sixun, *Sailing Boats and a Riverside Mountain*, 7th century C.E.

how unusual or subversive such praise of drunkenness is supposed to sound. It is far otherwise with another poem of Li Po's, translated by Owen, on the conventional theme of visiting a monk's retreat:

A dog barks amid the sound of waters,
Peach blossoms dark, bearing dew.
Where trees are thickest, sometimes
see a deer,
And when noon strikes the ravine,
hear no bell.
Bamboo of wilderness split through
blue haze,

A cascade in flight, hung from an
emerald peak.

But no one knows where you've gone—
Disappointed, I linger among these
few pines.

Nothing could seem more peaceful or reverent than these lines. So how could a contemporary English reader suspect that to a T'ang-era reader, in Owen's words, this poem also "violates basic decorum," because it contains "too many trees and at least two streams"? Or that the opening couplet is a "serious fault" because "a poem should begin with the general scene or an indication of the occasion," not with a specific detail like the dog barking, which "should be placed where the 'evidence trope' belongs, in the middle couplets, where its ingenuity can be muted by a parallel"?

When so much information is missing—and how could it be included?—from even a skillful translation, can an English reader be said to be reading Li Po at all? Or to put it another way, could a Chinese reader appreciate "The Rape of the Lock" if he knew nothing about eighteenth-century English social and sexual mores, about the rules of the epic and the tradition of the mock-epic, about the movements and the connotations of the heroic couplet? "Much of the energy and directness that readers feel in Li Po's poetry," Owen observes, "arises from his weakening of the barrier between couplets." But in Hinton's translations this feature of Li Po's verse disappears, because Hinton uses enjambment and run-ons between couplets throughout the anthology. "I have freely used the resources available in English, even when they do not correspond to anything in the original: enjambment, for instance, is rare in classical Chinese poetry," he writes in his notes. Nor could the reader guess from Hinton's free-verse lines that, in fact, many Chinese poems follow an elaborate rhyme scheme.

This is not, of course, a criticism. No translator of Chinese verse attempts to follow the original in meter or rhyme, for the simple reason that, if such fidelity is difficult even in translating a kindred language such as French or German, it is utterly impossible when dealing with a language like Chinese. That is why it is so appropriate that Pound, who knew no Chinese, should be the inventor of Chinese poetry in English. When reading English versions of Chinese poems, we are getting as close as the conditions of our knowledge will allow, but no closer—

we are reading the phenomenon, while the noumenon, the lyrical thing-in-itself, remains always out of reach.

YET ALL THIS notwithstanding, there is a great profusion of Chinese poetry in English, and this fact, too, is significant. It suggests that, despite all the barriers, this poetry does communicate, even urgently, to modern Western readers. Both the difficulty and the urgency are elegantly demonstrated in a short book by Eliot Weinberger called *Nineteen Ways of Looking at Wang Wei*. Weinberger simply collates and comments on a series of translations of Wang Wei's famous poem "Deer Park," allowing the reader to see how even this brief poem—twenty characters, in four lines—contains endless shades of meaning and implication. More, he shows how certain features of the Chinese—for instance, the absence of pronouns—are virtually uncapturable in English, so that almost every translator turns Wang's series of images into a first-person narration.

Yet again and again translators have returned to Wang Wei, hoping to create an English equivalent for his instant of illumination. Here is how Hinton translates the poem in *Classical Chinese Poetry*, successfully avoiding the "I":

No one seen. Among empty mountains,
hints of drifting voice, faint, no more.

Entering these deep woods, late
sunlight
flares on green moss again, and rises.

It is fruitless for the reader to wonder whether "flares" has the same connotations in English as what Wang wrote. Comparing this to other English versions, however, shows that Hinton's word is well chosen. Almost every translator in Weinberger's book uses "shine" to describe the action of light on moss, though Rexroth opts for "gleam." Hinton's "flares" emphasizes the suddenness of the light's appearance, allowing the reader to feel the poet's surprise as the sunlight trespasses on his dark, quiet retreat in the forest. The surprise is not just visual, Hinton emphasizes, but also temporal: the light is said to flare "again" because the sun is now setting, and the poet has not seen it since it rose.

Reading Wang Wei in the context of Hinton's anthology also helps the reader in a more profound sense, by placing in its literary and philosophical context what is, in fact, a deeply enigmatic poem. For if Wang takes care to tell us what he sees and hears, he has not a word to say about why it matters, or why he wished

to record it in verse. This reticence is especially characteristic of Wang, whom Hinton describes as "the great condenser of Chinese poetry." Wang, who lived from 701 to 761, was a painter as well as a poet, and the visual inspiration of his verse is unmistakable. As Hinton says, his poems "often turn on the sparest of images: a bird's cry, a splinter of light on moss, an egret's wingbeat." We have already seen the light on moss; the egret appears in another poem from the same sequence, "Wheel-Rim River," this one titled "Golden-Rain Rapids":

Wind buffets and blows autumn rain.
Water cascading thin across rocks,

waves lash at each other. An egret
startles up, white, then settles back.

Here all is movement, just as in "Deer Park" all is silence. It is the ability to conjure such sensations using just a few details that makes Wang's poems so effective. If all poems are distillations of experience, Wang's poems are doubly distilled: mere notations in which, paradoxically, a lived moment is powerfully preserved. Once Wang has seen something, the reader has seen it; and because what he sees is so elemental, no barriers of time and distance seem to separate the reader from the poet. This identification, this communication of a moment across the centuries and the cultures, is the real power of Wang's short poems, even more than their visual beauty.

POEMS, EVEN the most pictorial poems, are never really visual. They are not about things seen, but about why the poet feels compelled to preserve in writing what he sees. This is certainly true of Wang Wei and the many other poets in Hinton's anthology, who render individual moments not just for their own sake, or for the sake of a poetic image, but as demonstrations of a certain way of being in the world. The wanderer in "Deer Park" is able to forget himself, and to forget time, so deeply that he seems no longer to exist, until the sun flares to remind him. The egret in "Golden-Rain Rapids" is battered by the world but displays no more than an instant's discomposure before "settling back" into the integrity of his indifference. It is impossible to describe these poems without using a vocabulary that is more philosophical and even ethical than visual.

Wang Wei's views of the world imply a worldview. That worldview, which might be described as a fusion of Taoist cosmology and Buddhist epistemology, is not

just Wang's, but animates almost every poet in Hinton's anthology. To some extent, this is because Hinton himself is intent on teaching the reader to share the ethics and the metaphysics that he finds so appealing in the Chinese poets. This is a matter of overcoming subjectivity, of curing the breach between consciousness and the universe:

Self and its constructions of the world dissolve away, and what remains of us is empty consciousness itself, known in Ch'an [the Chinese word we know in its Japanese form, Zen] terminology as "empty mind" or "no mind." As absence, empty mind attends to the ten thousand things [i.e., everything that exists] with mirrorlike clarity, and so the act of perception itself becomes a spiritual act: empty mind mirroring the world, leaving its ten thousand things utterly simple, utterly themselves, and utterly sufficient. This spiritual practice is a constant presence in classical Chinese, in its fundamentally pictographic nature. It is also the very fabric of Chinese poetry, manifest in its texture of imagistic clarity.

There is something unmistakably late twentieth century in Hinton's love for Tao and Ch'an, and in his way with it. Sometimes he overly domesticates this ancient wisdom, making it sound like a familiar form of progressive orthodoxy, as when he congratulates Taoism for being "deeply ecological" and "radically feminist." As with Rexroth, these Chinese poets can sound distinctly New Age. Just as often, though, Hinton makes the Chinese poets sound like late Heidegger, as when he writes of their interest in "dwelling," or translates the central Taoist concept *tzu-jan* as "occurrence appearing of itself," echoing Heidegger's translation of the Greek *physis* as "things . . . insofar as they originate and come forth from themselves." (Both words, *tzu-jan* and *physis*, are more conventionally translated simply as Nature.) As with late Heidegger, and no doubt for the same historical reasons, Hinton admires a philosophy that seems more quietistic, modest, and anti-technological than Western rationalism.

JUST HOW RADICAL this detachment can become is apparent from Hinton's selections from the *Tao Te Ching*, the wisdom-classic traditionally attributed to Lao Tzu (a name that, Hinton remarks, "simply means 'Old Master'"). Again and again, this work advocates withdrawal from a world bound up with change and suffering:

Presence and absence give birth to
one another,
difficult and easy complete one another,
long and short measure one another,
high and low fill one another,
music and noise harmonize one
another,
before and after follow one another:

that's why a sage abides in the realm of
nothing's own doing,
living out that wordless teaching.

This diagnosis of the world and its becoming can sound like Platonism. But only a little: for what differs, radically, is Lao Tzu's prescription. The ideal here is not erotic-intellectual flight to a world of Being, but withdrawal into a world of Nothing. The wisdom of the sage is insistently negative:

Never bestow honors
and people won't quarrel.
Never prize rare treasures
and people won't steal.
Never flaunt alluring things
and people won't be confused.

"Honor is a contagion deep as fear, / renowned a calamity profound as self," reads another section; "If we didn't have selves / what calamity could touch us?" It is this wisdom, in which self-abnegation is pushed to the limits of possibility, that Hinton teaches us to find in the great Chinese poets. Wang Wei's restraint, his preference for a minimum of speech against a maximum of silence, thus comes to look like a Taoist gesture. In this context, it becomes easier to understand why Wang's treatment of Nature differs so radically from that of any Western poet before the twentieth century. English poetry uses nature to entice us into the world: it is a token of Creation's benevolence, or a summons to love and sex, or a teacher of wisdom, or a mirror of the self. For Wang, however, Nature is beautiful because it is the last stop on the mind's itinerary out of this world:

The cold river spreads boundless away.
Autumn rains darken azure-deep skies.

You ask about Whole-South Mountain:
mind knows far beyond white clouds.

With other poets, the Taoist, and later Buddhist, imperative toward withdrawal and renunciation is more explicit. Here is Tu Fu's "Thoughts":

Caught in the scramble for glory, we
people made bedlam lice of ourselves.

Before emperors, people ate their fill
and were content, then someone began

knotting ropes, and now we're mired
in the glue and varnish of government.

It all started with Sui, inventor of fire,
and Tung's fine histories made it utter

disaster. If you light candles and lamps,
you know moths will gather in swarms.

Search out through all eight horizons:
you find nothing anywhere but isolate

emptiness, departure and return one
movement, one ageless way of absence.

"Knotting ropes" was the original Chinese method of writing: here is a writer suggesting that it would have been better for human beings never to have learned how to write. And here, too, is a direct echo of the *Tao Tê Ching*: "Let people knot ropes for notation again / and never need anything more."

THESE LINES OF Tu Fu, who as Hinton writes is "generally described as the greatest of China's poets," offer a very pointed expression of the paradox that runs through *Classical Chinese Poetry*. It is impossible to be at the same time a poet and a sage, because the sage insists on withdrawal, inactivity, selflessness, and silence, while the poet lives by observation, creation, introspection, and speech. The poet who achieved enlightenment would not, and could not, still write poetry. Yet the significant fact, of course, is that all these poets did still write poetry—which is to say, the fact that they kept writing poetry is reason enough to doubt whether the great Chinese poets were quite so devoted to withdrawal and enlightenment as Hinton's philosophical introductions suggest. Self-abnegation was their trope, and perhaps even their ideal, but it was never their practice: they were too committed to perception and expression to desire a radical or permanent detachment.

It is true that almost all these poets wrote poems scorning the *beau monde* of the imperial capital, Chang'an—in the T'ang period, probably the largest city on earth—and declaring their longing for the simple life of the mountain recluse. Indeed, at "the head of the great Chinese poetic tradition," Hinton observes, stands T'ao Ch'ien, a nom de plume that means "Recluse T'ao." T'ao Ch'ien lived from 365 to 427, and became an exemplary figure to the T'ang poets, three centuries later,

because he preferred a humble life as a farmer to the intrigue and glamour of the court. As he writes in "Home Again Among Fields and Gardens":

Nothing like all the others, even as a
child,
rooted in such love for hills and
mountains,

I stumbled into their net of dust,
that one
departure a blunder lasting thirteen
years.

But a tethered bird longs for its old
forest,
and a pond fish its deep waters—
so now,

my southern outlands cleared, I nurture
simplicity among these fields and
gardens,

home again.

This Horatian note is struck again and again by the great T'ang poets. Wang Wei addresses a poem to an imperial official named Vice-Magistrate Chang: "Mind free of all ten thousand affairs, / self-regard free of all those grand schemes, / I return to my old forest, knowing empty." Li Po's "Mountain Dialogue" is a recluse's boast:

You ask why I've settled in these
emerald mountains:
I smile, mind of itself perfectly idle,
and say nothing.

Peach blossoms drift streamwater
away deep in mystery
here, another heaven and earth,
nowhere people know.

And Tu Fu writes idyllically about "The River Village" where "My wife draws a paper chessboard, / and tapping at needles, the kids contrive fishhooks. / Often sick, I need drugs and herbs—but what more, / come to all this, what more could a simple man ask?"

READING SUCH poems, it is easy to forget that their audience was precisely the well-connected literati who staffed the imperial bureaucracy, and that each of these poets eagerly pursued an official career. Even a poet such as Meng Hao-Jan—who, Hinton writes, "never left his native region to follow a government career," but "cultivated the independence of a simple life in his home mountains"—knows that

he is writing for the capital: one of his poems is titled "Sent to Ch'ao, the Palace Reviser," and contrasts the bureaucrat's "rue-scented libraries" with his own "bamboo-leaf gardens." Wang Wei came from a prominent family and rose to a high position in the bureaucracy. For Hinton, however, this is essentially irrelevant to his poetry: "Wang enjoyed a long and successful career in the government ... but it is clear that he found his truest self in mountain solitude." Likewise, Wei Ying-Wu, who "never left government service completely," was still "by nature a recluse." All this is entirely in keeping with Hinton's view of Chinese poets as teachers of Taoist-Buddhist wisdom.

But there is another way to look at these poets. It is possible to see them as worldly and sophisticated men who—like Horace, or like the Elizabethan court poets—found it creditable to praise rusticity, without intending to practice it unless bad luck and old age compelled them to do so. (If it is a sort of Stoicism that these poets seem to espouse, it is worth remembering that the great Stoics of Rome, Seneca and Cicero, spent their lives in the corridors of power.) As Stephen Owen notes, "Most High T'ang poets either served the state or wished to do so: the disdain for high office expressed by many famous poets was sporadic, and rarely accompanied by the conviction of action when an attractive opportunity for service was offered." This is not a question of hypocrisy or bad faith, but of the complex ways in which ideals and realities shape each other for any individual in any culture. It is telling that one of the standard subjects of Chinese poetry was visiting a remote monastery: they were good places to visit, but would the poet really want to live there? If he did, who would see his poetry?

THE EXCEPTION that proves this rule, in *Classical Chinese Poetry*, is Han Shan, whose name means Cold Mountain. There was in fact no such person, only a collection of poems that legend attributed to a wild monk who lived on Cold Mountain, writing verses on rocks and trees. In these poems, Hinton observes, the ambiguity of Chinese grammar makes it unclear whether the Cold Mountain that speaks is the author or the mountain itself:

Everyone who glimpses Cold Mountain
starts complaining about insane winds,

about a look human eyes can't endure
and a shape nothing but tattered robes.

They can't fathom these words of mine.

Theirs I won't even mention. I just tell

all those busy people bustling around:
Come face Cold Mountain for a change.

This elated contempt for the world is something different from most Chinese poets' philosophical disdain: it is more confrontational, and therefore sounds more authentic. It is no wonder that Gary Snyder's translation of the Cold Mountain poems was popular in the 1960s, since Han Shan can easily be made to sound like a counterculture dropout: "Go tell families with silverware and cars/'What's the use of all that noise and money?'" Snyder wrote, with Poundian anachronism.

But it is not necessary to change the stage properties of this thirteen-hundred-year-old poetry to make it sound contemporary. That is what David Young demonstrates in *Du Fu: A Life in Poetry*. (The names of most Chinese poets are familiar to English readers in the old Wade-Giles system of transliteration. The *pinyin* system, which became standard in the 1980s, can sometimes obscure their identities: it is clear enough that Du Fu is Tu Fu, but one would not necessarily recognize Li Bai as Li Po, or Bo Juyi as Po Chu-i.) The subtitle of Young's book explains his method. He arranges the poems of Tu Fu in chronological order and links them to the periods of his life, and of Chinese history, in which they were written.

Young is a poet with a self-confessed "limited knowledge of Chinese," a translator more on the Pound model than the Hinton model. But he insists that "my being able to situate a poet like Du Fu in the poetic practices of his time is more important, finally, than any fluency in Chinese," and his book offers strong support for this doubtful-sounding claim. For Tu Fu's life and times are a central part of his legend for Chinese readers. As Hinton says in *Classical Chinese Poetry*, he is known for "a realism that opened poetry to all aspects of human experience, from the intimate and concrete to the political and abstract," and he is referred to as "the poet-historian." Hinton's selection of twenty-two poems gives the reader some sense of this realism, as in "First-Devotion Return Chant":

I come home to sounds of weeping,
wailing
cries for a child stone-dead now of
hunger.

Neighbors sob in the street. And who
am I
to master my grief like some sage,

ashamed

even to be a father—I whose son has
died
for simple lack of food?

This is a different world from the jade staircases and the gauze robes of Li Po's erotic lament, or the moss and the egrets of Wang Wei's nature scenes (though Tu Fu also writes those kinds of poems). And reading Young's *Du Fu* helps the reader to grasp just how completely the poet's verse flows from his experience. The central event in Tu Fu's life was the An Lushan rebellion of 755, in which a rebel general took up arms against the T'ang emperor Xuanzong and captured Chang'an. The resulting civil war devastated China on a scale similar to the Thirty Years' War in Germany, and it disrupted the poet's life, embroiling him in political intrigues and making him a refugee for extended periods.

This biography leads Young to compare Tu Fu to such casualties of Europe's twentieth century as Paul Celan and Czesław Miłosz, and to characterize his work as "a remarkable and spirited rejoinder to the disasters and contingencies of history." This interpretation informs both Young's selections and his translations. Here, for instance, is how he renders the heartbreaking passage about the death of Tu Fu's son, quoted above in Hinton's version:

thinking ahead to my wife
trying to cope with this weather

desperate to be with my family
I arrive at last to learn

my little son has died
probably from sheer hunger

and I stand and weep in the street
the neighbors crowd round me,
weeping

my shame overwhelms me, a father
who couldn't feed his family...

Young's Tu Fu is considerably blunter, faster, and more casual than Hinton's—and doubtless less faithful to the original. But we do hear an individual human voice in these lines, a voice that we come to know and to sympathize with more and more deeply as Tu Fu's tragic story unfolds. By the end of Young's book, knowing as much as we now do about Tu Fu's constant displacements and long journeys, we are prepared to recognize the pathos of his self-description in "Ready to Go":

old age can't carry
sorrow's heavy burden

lots of able men
here at headquarters

fine people, you have done
brave deeds

I'm heading north
into the rain and snow

who'd spare a thought, even a tear,
for this traveler in shabby fur?

I face all these bound prisoners, helpless

little people scrambling for food, snared
in the law's net, and no reason for
shame.

I'm no different: adoring a meager
salary,
I follow orders, losing my chance to live
quiet and far away. No telling who's
noble,
who vile: we're all just angling for a meal.

Could I free them for the holiday at

least?

I brood in shame before ancients who
did.

No doubt our own time of troubles, our own ugly and vicious world, which separates the world of *Cathay* from the world of *Classical Chinese Poetry*, is the reason why the Chinese poets seem to speak to us more intimately now when they speak of suffering and disillusionment rather than of beauty and perfection—or even, in David Hinton's magisterial book, of enlightenment. ♦

THE POETS OF the T'ang Dynasty are by far the best known to English readers, and they make up the core of *Classical Chinese Poetry*. The poets of the subsequent Sung Dynasty, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, are not nearly as celebrated. In 1971, when Kenneth Rexroth included the work of Su Tung-P'o and Lu Yu in his enormously influential *One Hundred Poems from the Chinese*, he complained that these Sung masters had never been translated into English, and were "not anthologized satisfactorily even in Chinese." Yet Rexroth also noted that "the whole spirit of this time in China is very congenial today, especially to the romantic, empirical-mystic and antinomian taste which has prevailed in the arts of the West since 1940"; and it is still true, I think, that the Sung poets feel more approachable, closer to us in sensibility and in approach, than their T'ang predecessors.

The Sung Dynasty restored order to China after the fifty-year period of anarchy that followed the collapse of the T'ang Dynasty in the early 900s. According to Hinton, the new regime "returned the country to stability, peace, and prosperity"; and fittingly, for a time of rebuilding and retrenchment, the Sung poets seem to speak with a certain disillusioned realism, even a conscious belatedness. They can be seen as the naturalists and confessional post-modernists to the brilliantly abstract T'ang modernists. "Rather than looking to a carefully constructed realm of artifice for insight," Hinton remarks, "they looked to the workaday world in which we live our actual lives." Reading Su Tung-P'o (1037-1101), the greatest poet of the Sung, we find ourselves in a world of imperial injustices and battered ideals that we have no trouble recognizing as our own:

On New Year's Eve I should be home
early,
but this office full of business keeps me.

Writing-brush in hand, hiding my tears,

István Deák HONOR'S GASP

VALKYRIE: THE STORY OF THE PLOT TO KILL HITLER, BY ITS LAST MEMBER

By Philipp Freiherr von Boeselager
With Florence and Jérôme Fehrenbach
Translated by Steven Rendall
(Knopf, 211 pp., \$24.95)

TRY TO IMAGINE the following scenario. It is the winter of 1944 and the great German offensive in the Ardennes is threatening to push the Allied forces into the sea. To avert this disaster, General Patton, commander of the US Third Army, approaches General Bradley, commander of the 12th Army Group, and General Eisenhower, the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, with the proposition that they assist in the assassination of President Roosevelt. He holds the president responsible for America's participation in the war against Germany, and for the impending debacle. Patton tells the two commanders what they had known for a long time, which is that a good number of high-ranking American officers and also some distinguished civilian leaders are planning the assassination—and that one of the bravest conspirators, a highly decorated and terribly wounded colonel, has obtained easy access to the president, a great opportunity to implement the plan. Both Bradley and Eisenhower find excuses for not participating in the plot (one pleads advanced age, and the other argues that while he is in favor of the overthrow, murder would turn Roosevelt into a martyr), but neither summons the MPs to arrest the treasonous general. Patton returns to his post and soon thereafter the brave colonel attempts the assassination, but the president miraculously survives.

On the very same day, Patton, the colonel, and several other American officers are arrested, tried, and executed—not by the police, or by the military authorities, but by a fellow-conspirator trying to save his skin. The war continues into the next year, with immense losses on both sides.

It is insanely far-fetched, I know. But it is no different, in essence, from what happened in Nazi Germany in July 1944, when some generals approached Field Marshal Rommel, the commander of Europe's western defenses, and Field Marshal Rundstedt, the commander of all German military forces in the West, with the request that they head the plot to assassinate Hitler. The two declined, with the above-mentioned arguments; and neither of them lifted a finger to prevent the plot from succeeding. The four German field marshals in the East, each one in charge of an army group, also knew about the plan to rid Germany and humanity of the tyrant, and they, too, did not betray the plot.

All in all, we do not know of a single officer among the thousands aware of the conspiracy who tried to prevent it. When time came for retribution, and a generals' court of honor was duly convoked in order to deprive the conspirators of their military rank and to drum them out of the army, the president of the court, Field Marshal Rundstedt, should himself have been sitting on the defendants' bench for having failed to report the assassination project. For a large part of the German army high command had been looking forward to the assassination of their commander-in-chief, and to the drastic

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reorganization of their system of government. And yet Rundstedt's court of honor proceeded to degrade and to expel from the army such illustrious commanders as Field Marshal von Witzleben, allowing for their torture and strangulation with a thin wire while dangling from a butcher's hook.

One might argue that my fantastic scenario would have been inconceivable in the United States not least because it was not losing the war, whereas Germany was in desperate straits in 1944, and the killing of the Führer seemed to offer the last chance for avoiding total defeat. But then it is important to remember that military plots against Hitler began as early as 1938, when he was at the apogee of his diplomatic successes and domestic popularity. A major conspiracy to overthrow, and if necessary to kill, the Führer was headed by Witzleben and Colonel-General Ludwig Beck, the former chief of the general staff. It failed because just when the plotters planned to act, Prime Minister Chamberlain decided to throw in the towel and give the Sudetenland to Hitler. One cannot kill a head of state when the entire nation is about to celebrate his magnificent and peaceful victories. It also hampered the conspiracy that the British government, to which the conspirators had sent notices begging for help, communicating crucial military secrets and expressing their wish to see Germany defeated, treated the messengers as traitors to their fatherland or as spies. And high-ranking military and civilian plotters looked for ways to kill Hitler also in 1942, when the Allies were nowhere near Europe, while in the east German troops were surrounding Leningrad and storming into Stalingrad, and the Führer's flag flew from the highest peak of the Caucasus. No, the attempt to kill the Führer was not the product of despair over a lost war, although it is true that the tyrannical attempts began to multiply in 1943, following the traumatic German defeat at Stalingrad.

One might argue also that an officers' revolt is inconceivable in a democracy; that such things are the specialty of dictatorships. But this does not explain the vast extent—and the airtight discretion—of the German military resistance. After all, no officers' plots arose in the tyrannical Soviet Union, except in the fevered imagination of Stalin and his cronies. The victims of Stalin's monster purges were mostly his devoted followers, and some hailed his name while they were waiting to be shot. In Germany, participants in the July 20 conspir-

acy were tortured to admit to acts that had violated Nazi law; but in the Soviet Union, victims of the purges were tortured to plead guilty to crimes that they had never committed.

German army officers joined in the conspiracy for many reasons, but a yearning for democracy inspired only a few of them. Most of the plotters had begun as ardent supporters of the National Socialist dictatorship. The reasons that they later described for their eventual alienation were such things as the Nazis' plebeian crudity and irresponsible demagoguery; National Socialism's un-Christian ideology and occasional anti-Church acts; the euthanasia program that led to the deaths of thousands of handicapped Germans; Hitler's amateurish generalship; the two-front war and the fear of military defeat; the rise—and the overwhelming power—of the SS, the army's main military and political rival; the mistreatment of Russian prisoners of war and of the eastern population in general; and finally, but only in a few cases, the persecution and the extermination of the Jews.

Esprit de corps certainly helps to explain why these officers were unwilling to betray one another to the outsiders in the SS and the Nazi Party. It might also explain why the plotters operated strictly within the confines of the army and among a select group of mostly conservative civilians. There is no evidence of the plotters having approached their comrades in the navy and the air force, the two less traditional branches of service whose officers were generally devoted to Hitler. (Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, head of the military counter-intelligence service called the *Abwehr*, was one of the founders of the resistance movement.) But then, while a similar esprit de corps prevailed in the great old armies of France, Great Britain, and even the United States, it is inconceivable that officers in those countries would have tolerated potential regicides in their ranks. So we must look for another explanation. And in this search the memoirs of Philipp von Boeselager offer some useful hints.

LIEUTENANT Philipp von Boeselager was a junior member of the anti-Hitler conspiracy, with the main distinction that he alone, of all the conspirators, was called upon to provide massive military support for the killing of the Führer. In all the other cases, commanders planned to operate without troops, or with troops that they would deliberately mislead about the purpose of the exercise. The officers in Boeselager's cavalry

battalion, by contrast, were made to understand that the goal of their sudden relocation from the front in July 1944 was not to defend, but to topple, the Nazi regime. Boeselager's other distinction was that he outlived his fellow conspirators of July 20. He died on May 1, 2008, at the age of ninety, and in the course of his long life he received many recognitions and decorations which many of his comrades would also have deserved.

The Boeselager ancestors were barons, or *Freiherren*, free knights, many of whom chose to serve the archbishop of Cologne and the archbishop of Mainz. Philipp was born in a castle near Bonn in 1917, and was brought up in the strict manner of German Catholic aristocrats. The fifth among nine brothers and sisters, he started very early to ride a horse and to hunt: "We learned how to keep our sangfroid in the tumult of dogs excited by the battle, how to strike the throat of a stag or a boar in the coup de grâce and look without revulsion at the dark red fluid bubbling out of mortal wounds." All this took place in full awareness of, as he puts it, "the laws of life ... the struggles of existence.... Hunting also accustomed us to the laws of violent death, internalized the notion of an offering. Yes, hunting was a preparation for the supreme sacrifice—the sacrifice of life."

The boys in the family attended a Jesuit school, and the years spent there "helped root in us a solid, authentic, uncomplicated, moderate faith." Nothing indeed could have been more widespread among upper-class Germans, and many other aristocratic Europeans, than this "uncomplicated" faith, which did not amount to a profound devotion, except perhaps among aristocratic women. But it drove Philipp to stand up for his church. He was member simultaneously of a Nazi youth organization and of the Catholic Congregation of Mary, and when his Nazi superior ordered him, in 1937, to choose between the two organizations, he refused. Boeselager's memoirs indicate that his refusal was a question of personal dignity and not of religious belief.

Philipp's idol was Georg, his older brother by two years and a career soldier. At first both brothers served in the same exclusive Paderborn cavalry regiment, which was "hermetically sealed off from much of the outside world.... Sports were far more important than political discussion. Jumping and dressage were our daily occupations." When the war broke out, however, hopes for a new era of dashing cavalry attacks quickly dissipated, and the regiment was divided into reconnoi-

tering units within thirty-three infantry divisions. The campaign against France in the spring of 1940 brought glory especially to Georg, whose heroic exploits made him a celebrity. As in almost all military memoirs, in these reminiscences both Georg and Philipp invariably prove correct in their major decisions in battle, as opposed to the orders of stubborn and unimaginative superiors.

Life was good for the two brothers in occupied France, with horse races in elegant company and a French public most appreciative of the cordial behavior of German officers. But in March, 1941 Georg's division was transferred to the east, and Philipp's unit followed somewhat later. In the beginning Operation Barbarossa was just another triumphant march, although this time on dusty or muddy trails ironically called highways; but in August, one of their older brothers was killed. (Altogether, Philipp lost three of his brothers in the war.) In October, when the roads turned into sewers, Philipp's cavalry unit rode miles and miles ahead of the motorized formations and finally stopped northeast of Moscow, with no enemy in sight. The officers settled down to a life of leisure, which included hours in the sauna and delightful hunting parties. Meanwhile the talented and brave Georg was advancing rapidly in rank: at twenty-six, he was commanding an entire battalion. He organized literary competitions and was planning to offer classes in Latin.

Final victory seemed certain, until the "brutal awakening": the Red Army's ferocious counterattack in mid-December 1941. Temperatures had descended well below zero, and whereas the attacking Russians were equipped for the cold and the snow, the Germans were still wearing their thin uniform jackets. Philipp was badly wounded—the first but not the last such calamity in his brief military career. The wounded of his unit were loaded into an unheated freight train, which remained stationary for three days without their receiving any care or food. Half of them froze to death. While marooned in the train Philipp was wounded twice more, in aerial attacks. When finally evacuated, the train traveled for nearly three weeks with little food, water, or medical care. All this reminds one of the deportation of Jews or Russian prisoners of war, and thereby exposes the fatal contradictions of the German army: it was still the best in the world, able to mount its most devastating campaigns in 1942, but it was often incapable of providing for its soldiers and it had no withdrawal strategy, which caused terrible losses.

For the wounded Philipp there came a miracle, when Georg, less seriously wounded, was called into the Führer's presence in East Prussia to be awarded the highest military decoration possible for a younger officer. At Georg's personal request, Hitler ordered that Philipp be transferred, under the care of two special nurses, to a hometown hospital. It took him four months to recover and to return to the east. This time, rather than being sent to the front, he was assigned to the headquarters of Army Group Center as an aide-de-camp to Field Marshal Günther von Kluge. By then Army Group Center was functioning as a nest of German military resistance. Meanwhile Georg was in Romania teaching the German allies the art of war, which left him with enough time to deepen his contempt for the Führer. Even earlier Georg had exclaimed: "That obtuse parvenu! He is a cheap café politician pretending to be a genius!"

THE PATTERN FOR the two brothers was set: for the rest of the war they would alternate between desk jobs that allowed them to plot mutiny, even assassination, and volunteering for the front, where they displayed extraordinary heroism and self-sacrifice. Philipp was wounded five times during the war and Georg even more often, but each time, emaciated and sick, they managed to limp back into service. Neither seemed to notice the contradiction between their two modes of behavior: after all, at least as Philipp and other conspirators claimed afterwards, their goal had not been to rid the army of the amateur strategists Hitler, Göring, and Himmler in order to fight more efficiently, but to put an end to the war as speedily and in as dignified a way as possible. Disagreements arose only between those, the majority, who saw the way to peace through a negotiated surrender to the Western powers and a continued defense against the Soviet Red Army, and a minority who were willing to surrender to the Soviets too, or only to the Soviets.

The assassination of Hitler—no matter how criminal his behavior and how amateurish his conduct of the war—could not but weaken the German war effort. Also, as Field Marshal Kluge pointed out to the resisters, assassination might lead to a domestic war between the SS and the army. Why, then, did these people risk their lives in conspiracies? Some certainly expected to win over the West for a joint military campaign against the Soviet Union—even Himmler nurtured such hopes in the last year of the war;

but the more thoughtful among them knew that the alliance of the three world powers was unbreakable. At best, the demand for unconditional German surrender, announced at Casablanca in January, 1943 could be mitigated. Henning von Tresckow, Kluge's chief operations officer, declared to his colleagues about the plot to kill Hitler: "Gentlemen, every day we are assassinating nearly sixteen thousand additional victims. We have no choice." The statement is evidence of a deep humanitarian impulse, which was not common among the conspirators.

For years Kluge had been highly critical of Hitler and his clique, but he still accepted the diamond-studded baton of a *Generalfeldmarschall* from the Führer in 1940, and two years later a gift of 250,000 marks. Similarly enormous sums of money were offered to the other field marshals, and only Witzleben refused to accept what amounted to a bribe. The head of resistance at Army Group Center was not the cautious field marshal, but Colonel (later *Generalmajor*) Tresckow, one of the most intelligent and determined leaders of the anti-Hitler conspiracy. Of Prussian noble stock with a long military tradition, Tresckow was a model general staff officer, the best of the best among Germany's soldiers. He turned against Hitler as early as 1934, but served nonetheless in ever more important positions in all of Germany's military campaigns. Meanwhile he attempted to assassinate the Führer.

By the time Philipp joined Kluge's headquarters, he had been influenced in his rejection of Nazism, as he recalls in this book, by his distant cousin Clemens August Count von Galen, the bishop of Münster, who in his sermons protested the Nazis' euthanasia program and anti-church policy. It did not occur to Galen to mention the persecution of Jews, nor does Philipp bemoan this omission in his memoirs. What converted Philipp finally to the anti-Nazi cause, he records, was a report that accidentally fell into his hands in the spring of 1942. It described the SS Security Service's "special treatment" of five Roma men in the army's rear area. According to Philipp's memoirs, Field Marshal Kluge himself wondered what the expression "special treatment" could mean, and he was outraged to hear SS General Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski's casual explanation that it meant the shooting of all Jews and Gypsies in the army's rear. "This incident changed my view of the war," Philipp writes. "I was disgusted and afraid."

One wants to believe Philipp, who until then had been either at the front or

in a hospital, but it is impossible to believe in the field marshal's sudden indignation. How could he not have known about the *Einsatzgruppen's* execution of one million Jews and many thousands of others during the first year of Barbarossa? Even Kluge's predecessor, the weak Field Marshal Bock, protested the SS brutalities in a letter to Hitler. Nor is it possible to accept that the highest echelons of the army group would have known nothing about the frequent participation of regular army units in the massacres. And yet one finds no recognition of the latter fact in Boeselager's memoirs.

While Philipp was brooding over the dishonor that the Nazi gangsters were bringing upon the army, Kluge was repeatedly invited to the Führer's eastern headquarters at Vinnytsya, and in this way Philipp, too, became a guest at Hitler's table. On one occasion he got into a dangerous altercation with Martin Bormann, secretary to the Führer, and was rescued by the intervention of Kluge. Meanwhile the anti-Hitler group around Tresckow was consolidating itself with, as one of its most interesting members, Fabian von Schlabrendorff, another aristocrat who was a lawyer and now also an officer. It is important to note that by the end of the war only two major conspirators from Army Group Center, Philipp von Boeselager and Fabian von Schlabrendorff, were still alive. There are not many documents regarding resistance activities in the Center. Most of what we know about the grand conspiracy there stems from the pen of these two men. I do not mean to doubt their veracity, only to say that they may have forgotten things and, even more likely, as is inevitable in all memoirs, they may have embellished their roles. (I should add that Philipp von Boeselager makes a very favorable impression in his interviews in *Restless Conscience*, Hava Kohav Beller's documentary on the German resistance, which appeared in 1992 and was nominated for an Oscar.)

Soon Georg arrived from Romania, and to the great joy of the many cavalrymen at army headquarters he persuaded Kluge to allow the formation of an independent cavalry unit of one thousand horses with Georg as their commander. It grew into an entire regiment, and later Philipp was put in charge of one of the regiment's two battalions. The British and the Americans also had their cavalry during the war, but this meant

motorized units equipped with swift and light armor. For the Germans, horses were better in the swamps or the melting snow than trucks and tanks. The von Boeselager cavalry was used mainly to fight the numerous partisans in the region. It is interesting that Philipp, who claims to have been so profoundly distressed over the fate of the Jews and other civilians, does not mention the brutality of partisan warfare. Yet his men must have torched many villages and hanged many a real or supposed partisan warrior. It is true that the partisans were no less ruthless than the Germans: both terrorized the rural population—yet it is very wrong, though journalists do it all time, to mention the fighting between occupiers and the occupied in the same breath with the occupiers' systematic extermination of civilians.

Under Tresckow's guidance, the officers at Army Group Center devised plan after plan for Hitler's elimination. To arrest and try him would have been best, but was obviously impossible. Some, including the Boeselager brothers, volunteered to shoot him in suicidal missions; others wanted to use bombs. But something always went awry. Hitler did not show up as scheduled, or he came for only a short time, or there was a risk that Kluge and those in the conspiracy would be blown up together with the Führer. Some volunteers developed moral qualms; others did not wish to be blamed for Germany's defeat. Not even Tresckow was willing to shoot down Hitler like a dog. The most promising plan was to put a bomb, disguised as cognac, in Hitler's plane; on

March 13, 1943 the bottles made it on to the plane—but the British-made detonator failed, and Schlabrendorff, who had given the bomb to an unsuspecting officer among Hitler's attendants, had to take enormous risks to recover the dud before they were all unmasked.

In October 1943, Kluge was badly wounded in a car accident, and his successor, Field Marshal Busch, could not be counted on to help in any way. When Kluge finally returned to duty, it was as commander-in-chief in the West, replacing Field Marshal Rundstedt. Tresckow decided to send Georg von Boeselager, on June 26, 1944, to Kluge in Paris, asking that he open the front and surrender unconditionally to the British and American forces. In that way the war effort could be shifted "entirely to Russia to prevent Germany from being crushed by the Soviet war machine." He also recommended that a peace offer be made to the Allies, for which Georg volunteered to fly secretly to England. How Tresckow expected to combine unconditional surrender with peace negotiations is unclear.

Time was of the essence, because on June 22 the Red Army launched Operation Bagration, a gigantic military attack that assembled 2.3 million men against the 800,000 men of Army Group Center. This historic event, which is almost completely ignored in the West, was mounted at least in part to prevent Hitler from moving troops and tanks west against the Allies in Normandy. Busch's defenses were almost immediately pulverized, with the Russians soon reaching the Vistula River near Warsaw. By August 19, when the offensive was stopped, Army Group Center's casualties had amounted to 560,000 soldiers. I still remember the first post-liberation Soviet newsreel in Budapest that showed some 50,000 captive soldiers of Army Group Center being marched through sunny Moscow between two rows of eerily silent spectators.

Georg left the collapsing front for Paris with the officially approved but astonishing justification that Lord Wagram, a stallion of the Boeselager family, was running at Longchamp. But his real mission failed, because Kluge again refused to cooperate, claiming that the Allies would soon break through and so there was no need to hurry. By then the conspiratorial action at home had passed into the hands of Colonel Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg, who was determined to blow up the Führer.

Sheep Leg

In following the waterway across the hill, York gum saplings holding out against the erosive sidewash induced by downpours, you come across the leg of a sheep, flesh eaten away, bones held together by sinews that have dried and tightened—the leg is seized in the moment of "fall to your knees..." It points neither up nor down the hill, nor divinely the length of the waterway. A sheep death under the old regime, a time when sheep kept the grass down and died to rot where they fell. Dismembered by foxes; strewn about. Most of the corpses were relocated before we arrived, but the odd bleached skull, thigh bone, clump of fat and wool remain. And the leg. It keeps its own counsel.

JOHN KINSELLA

Stauffenberg's plot, Operation Valkyrie, failed because he was half-blind and had only three fingers, which did not allow him to activate the detonators on both of his bombs. Also, the officers met with Hitler not in the Führer's bunker but in a wooden building that easily flew apart at the explosion. Moreover, an adjutant inadvertently pushed the briefcase containing the bombs behind a heavy table leg: again, Hitler's luck. No less importantly, the conspirators in Berlin did not dare act without Stauffenberg's presence, and he brought the mistaken information that Hitler was dead. When the opposite turned out to be the case, the Führer's legendary charisma triumphed even in his absence: those waiting to hear of Hitler's death before daring to act now quickly defected. Others turned against the conspirators: General Friedrich Fromm, the commander of the Replacement Army and Stauffenberg's superior, a member of the conspiracy, now had Stauffenberg and others shot dead. (He, too, was executed later.) Many of the plotters had feared that their success would bring the Red Army deep into Germany, so they participated in the putsch not to win but to die with honor.

Stauffenberg could have saved himself for another day by disappearing when he found out that the Führer was still alive, but as an officer and a proud aristocrat he would not desert his fellows. Hundreds were executed in the subsequent nine months; and thousands who were accused of membership in the conspiracy were sent to prison or to a concentration camp. Most tragically for these soldiers, the "court of honor" presided over by Rundstedt marked the end of the military caste that had raised Prussia, which is to say Germany, to the status of a great power. Lower-middle-class civilians in Party or SS uniform thereby triumphed over the generals, until they themselves went down in total defeat.

PHILIPP VON BOESELAGER writes in his memoirs that the planners of Operation Valkyrie instructed him to lead his cavalry battalion, over a thousand strong, in a precipitous ride westward, away from the front, to a point near Brest-Litovsk in Belorussia. There they would leave their horses behind and be driven to an airstrip in Poland, from where they would immediately fly to Berlin's Tempelhof Airport. It was a bold plan. Considering that the outcome of Valkyrie was ultimately decided by the commander of the Berlin Guards Battalion who had chosen to remain loyal to the Führer, the sudden arrival of an anti-

Hitler battalion, made up of battlefield veterans, might have saved the day for the conspirators. The horsemen would also have provided the badly needed rank-and-file element to what had been an exclusively elite affair.

But is the story true? Amazingly, no historian of the resistance has questioned the reliability of Boeselager's account. Perhaps, in the chaos of the overwhelming Soviet attack, a whole battalion could ride away from the front, unnoticed; and perhaps, in the midst of a precipitous *sauve-qui-peut*, Army Group Center would be willing to spare the many trucks needed to transport the battalion to "an aerodrome in the former Poland." But why is it impossible to find on the map the localities that Boeselager named for his great ride? And why are the ones that may be found not where they are supposed to be? Nor are we told who had promised to provide Boeselager with those airplanes. About fifty Junkers 52s, the air force's workhorse, would have been needed to transport a thousand men and their equipment in one swoop. I doubt that the Luftwaffe could have mustered so many transport planes for any purpose at that time, and certainly not for a junior cavalry officer. Boeselager writes that once the coded message arrived about the failure of the coup d'état, he quickly marched his battalion back to the frontline, again unnoticed. All in all, they spent three days and three nights in the saddle, covering nearly three hundred miles. Maybe, but I cannot help feeling that all this is an account not of what Philipp von Boeselager did, but of what he longed to do.

FOR OBVIOUS REASONS, the conspirators at Army Group Center could not play a crucial role in the events unfolding on July 20 at the Wolf's Lair in Rastenburg, and in Berlin, Paris, Prague, and Vienna. Thus members of the Tresckow group had a chance to escape Hitler's revenge, or at least to kill themselves, which, if nothing else, might mean a pension for their family. To give the impression that he died in combat, Tresckow drove to an area infested by partisans and blew off his head with a hand grenade. He was given a proper military funeral, but later his coffin was excavated and taken to the crematorium in Sachsenhausen concentration camp.

The two field marshals in the West committed suicide: Kluge because he feared arrest and torture. Rommel was ordered to swallow poison, and was then given a state funeral worthy of Germany's greatest general. Fabian von Schlabrendorff was arrested and tortured, but he

refused to give up names. He avoided the death sentence when Roland Freisler, the terrible "people's judge," was killed in an air attack, still clutching Schlabrendorff's court papers. Later he was lucky enough to escape summary execution by the SS, which is what happened to many resisters virtually until the day of liberation. Georg von Boeselager was killed by mortar fire at the end of August 1944, at the front on the border of East Prussia. The Führer posthumously awarded the highest military decoration to the man who had repeatedly volunteered to kill him.

Philipp, who had been wounded again and again, was now a cavalry major. He saw many more battlefield adventures and was finally captured by a British cavalry unit in Austria. He was treated as befits a fellow horseman, and soon he and the Englishmen were hunting together in the Alps while enjoying the beauties of a countryside untouched by war. Again, as in the Soviet Union in the fall of 1941, he organized equestrian tournaments and Roman chariot races, wearing togas, but this time for the entertainment of both British and German cavalymen. "By July, I was home again, my pistol in my belt and flanked by my two horses." They were the same horses that had taken him to war in 1939.

Georg Freiherr von Boeselager, Axel von dem Bussche, Rudolph-Christoph Freiherr von Gersdorff, Wolf-Heinrich Graf von Helldorf, Ewald Heinrich von Kleist, Helmuth James Graf von Moltke, Fritz-Dietlof Graf von der Schulenburg, Ulrich Wilhelm Graf Schwerin von Schwanenfeld, Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg, Dr. Adam von Trott zu Solz, Peter Graf Yorck von Wartenburg: this is just a sampling of the aristocrats who made up the majority of the July 20 conspirators. Obviously there were also many commoners among them, such as the socialists Julius Leber and Adolf Reichwein, the civil servant Dr. Carl Goerdeler, and the theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer; but Hitler was right to rage about the conspiracy of aristocrats against him. These grandees did not betray each other except under the most bestial torture, and even then not always. They had originally joined Hitler's "national revolution" so as not to feel cut off from the people, but gradually they discovered that their place was not with the howling mob. And so they conspired to save Germany from its leaders and its population. They sensed that the cause of their caste was hopeless, but they wanted to go down in dignity. In this, they succeeded. When they died, Germany lost some of its more admirable sons. ♦

Richard Jenkins

UNSACRED MONSTERS

**A STRANGE EVENTFUL HISTORY:
THE DRAMATIC LIVES OF ELLEN TERRY,
HENRY IRVING, AND THEIR
REMARKABLE FAMILIES**

By Michael Holroyd
(Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 620 pp., \$40)

BEN AND SARAH Terry, parents of the more famous Ellen, were jobbing actors. Six of their nine children had stage careers. Ellen Terry was to become the most celebrated of Victorian actresses, but her sister Kate was also considerably admired, and at least two more siblings had something of a name in their time. Ellen lived for some years with E. W. Godwin, an architect of originality, who also turned his hand to stage design. Their daughter Edith Craig was engaged in various theatrical activities and ran a rather unsuccessful progressive company for a while; their son, Edward Gordon Craig, was to acquire a grand if elusive reputation as a designer and theorist of the stage. Kate Terry was to become the grandmother of John Gielgud. Ellen enjoyed a long partnership with Henry Irving, the most famous of Victorian actors, at the Lyceum in London, and it is likely that for a while they were lovers. Irving's two sons, by his estranged wife Florence, both went on the stage and had respectable careers, cut short by premature death, Laurence drowning with his wife when a liner went down off Quebec, and Harry perishing in middle life of anaemia.

One can see the immediate attraction of putting together "the dramatic lives of two remarkable families," as the subtitle of Michael Holroyd's group biography puts it. On second thought, one might ask whether the subject has any natural coherence. There are not very many novels that carry across the generations, but at least the novelist has the power of invention. The biographer is the prisoner of reality. The danger is that the story will become desultory, without clear shape and direction, and it is a danger that Holroyd does not wholly escape. He does not, in fact, explore the whole family. He says very little about Ellen Terry's brother and sisters; Ellen herself dominates the greater part of the book, until Edward

Gordon Craig takes over the lead; Edith Craig, Henry Irving's sons and, more surprisingly, Henry Irving himself play prominent but clearly secondary roles.

Holroyd is an accomplished accumulator of facts and anecdotes; and he writes easily and fluently, sometimes with a wry humor. His book is all foreground: he tells us a great deal about the principal figures in his story, but little about their social and cultural context. He can be touching: Ellen Terry's decline and death are finely told. Much of his material, though, is the higher gossip, exhaustively recounting the pretty ordinary events of people's lives and careers. Readers who appreciate this sort of thing—and there seem to be plenty of them—are likely to enjoy the book, but for all the elegance of Holroyd's prose I found long tracts of it just boring. When he tells us that Ellen Terry took the bus to get from Camden Town to the Prince of Wales's Theatre, or details the engagements in the younger Irvings' unimportant careers, or lists the forgotten plays performed by Edith Craig's failing company, one begins to wonder, what's the point? And for all the length of the book, the impression it leaves is oddly muffled: it is as though we are watching the performers from the back of the orchestra, and through gauze. Of course, no one can recreate the magic of Irving or Ellen Terry on stage, but her personality at least comes out vividly in her letters, exuberant, passionate, imperfectly literate, sometimes half inarticulate, with masses of exclamation marks, capital letters and multiple underlinings—like Queen Victoria on acid. But Holroyd's book gives no sense of their character. It is very odd.

EDWARD GORDON CRAIG would have suited the pen of one of Holroyd's earlier subjects, Lytton Strachey. After trying, unsuccessfully, to make his way as an actor, he turned to stage design and production. His early works created a sensation though the radical simplification of their settings and a new subtlety in the use of light and shadow. He then went to the continent, and was to spend the rest of his life abroad, settling after some *Wanderjahre* in Italy, and later in France, uttering vatic thoughts about the theater but designing (apparently) very little. The less he did, the more his reputation rose.

He was a charming and handsome man, who always attracted respect—admirers, lovers, and disciples. He was horrible. He had children by at least eight different women, whom he treated abominably. The devoted Dorothy Lees, who slaved on his behalf for years, was abandoned in poverty. Her successor was required to take dictation naked, and then to work for him unpaid. In 1911 his admirers organized an eight-course dinner in his honour at the Café Royal; Ellen Terry was among the one-hundred and eighty guests, tears of pride in her son rolling down her cheeks. Was Craig grateful? "They gave me a high tea," he wrote, "and then they all went home, feeling they had done their bit." When his daughter by Isadora Duncan drowned in a car accident, he did not bother to come to the funeral. He also skipped the jubilee celebrations for his mother's fifty years on the stage, though he did attend her funeral, remarking loudly that "we must have more occasions like this". He seems to have taken next to no interest in his children. A second son drowned (what a lot of drowning there is in this story), but what would have been an appalling blow to most parents seems not to have affected him at all.

The First World War was arranged without any consideration for Craig's feelings. "I never dreamt," he wrote, "that a little war could add so to the numerous disturbances that one's work already *had* before it was begun." Later he thought highly of Mussolini and Hitler, and noted approvingly that with the Nazis in power Max Reinhardt was being "driven from the German theatre, as its Jews are not much wanted." It was rotten luck, after this, that while living in Paris in 1940 he was arrested and interned as an enemy alien. But he was soon released, sold part of his archive to the German government for a good sum, and saw out the rest of the war in France and in comfort.

After the war, he was indignant that the British government did not grant him a civil list pension. He had never had "a scrap of help from England," he grumbled, "what a swindling world it is." (The Nazis had been more thoughtful.) When he grew frail, one of his daughters was summoned from England to look after him, and found that she was not only required to skivvy for him (she was to draw the curtains at twenty to eight before serving him the first of his daily meals and run errands for the rest of the day) but also to spend her small savings to keep him in his accustomed style of life: he needed good restaurants, holidays in good hotels, and taxis to wait for him all day. In his old age he looked sweet and beautiful, and he

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died peacefully at the age of ninety-four, demonstrating to the end the advantages of ruthless and resolute selfishness.

THERE IS A black fascination in reading about such easy, triumphant nastiness, though after a while it becomes monotonous. The interesting issue is whether he mattered, and if so, in what way. Was Edward Gordon Craig important? What did he do? That last question, in its most literal sense, goes unanswered in Holroyd's book. During all those years in Italy, it is unclear what he lived on, or how he was spending most of his time. There was no family money (Ellen Terry herself felt the pinch in her old age) and yet Craig was recurrently able to refuse work, turning down offers from London, Paris, and La Scala after negotiations broke down.

In 1911 he published *On the Art of the Theatre*, a book that Holroyd says "was to become a seminal work throughout Europe and America during the twentieth century"; but he tells us nothing of its argument, contenting himself with a few mutterings about "poetic mystery" and "prophetic prose." As for importance, Craig himself was in no doubt. "I am the man who can save the theater and shall do so unaided," he told his mother. Isadora Duncan was one of the few people whom he could praise: "the only one whose Genius was akin to mine." Scorn was his more usual coin: Shakespeare was unactable, Wagner hated the theater, and more sweepingly, "It is not only the writer whose work is useless in the theater. It is the musician's work which is useless there, and it is the painter's work which is useless there." That might at least seem to spare the performers, but no: "I believe in the time when we shall be able to create works of art in the Theatre without the use of the written play, without the use of actors." This is portentous nonsense. Was there not more to him than that? I think we should be told.

And indeed there is an interesting story to be told of change and continuity across the generations. Ellen Terry's life reveals the surprising fluidity of much of Victorian society. Despite her modest birth, before she was twenty she was friendly with Tennyson, Lewis Carroll, and other literary figures famous in their time, and had married the painter George Frederick Watts. Watts himself straddled various worlds. His grand, often mythological canvases were too cloudy and symbolic for him to rank with the classical painters, and too portentous for him to belong with the aesthetic movement; but he had something in common with both tenden-

cies. Watts was more than two and a half times the age of his bride, and the marriage foundered within a few months.

Ellen's life with Godwin took her into yet another artistic milieu. Godwin made his name as a young architect with a confident high-Victorian Gothic town hall for the Midlands city of Northampton, but others of his rather few buildings showed an almost modernist simplification of form. They included the famous house in Chelsea that he designed for Whistler, which might almost pass for an early work of Frank Lloyd Wright. In their own house in Bloomsbury, Ellen Terry would dress in Grecian robes or a kimono. The walls were white, the curtains and cushions gray-blue; in the center stood a cast of the Venus de Milo, before which was a censer issuing wisps of curling, bluish smoke. This was an early and a chastened style of aestheticism, without the floridity and posturing that one associates with, say, Oscar Wilde.

Godwin also turned to stage design. For the actor-manager Squire Bancroft he did *The Merchant of Venice*, with sets said to have looked like old Italian pictures and unlike anything seen on the stage before. Max Beerbohm thought it the first production of a classic "in which the modern spirit of stage management asserted itself." Godwin also produced *Helena in Troas*, a piece of Greek pastiche by the obscure John Todhunter; Wilde thought the play poor but the production "the most perfect exhibition of a Greek dramatic performance that has yet been seen in this country." In this light, Edward Gordon Craig can be seen as the heir of both his parents: from his mother he got the sense of theater, from his father the aesthetic of simplification.

IRVING AND ELLEN TERRY at the Lyceum represent a profession in transition. Despite the irregularity of his life—his estrangement from his wife was unconcealed—the pressure for him to be knighted grew irresistible and in 1895 he became the first actor to receive this honor. Ellen Terry's life was more irregular still: she had lived openly with a man to whom she was not married and had two children by him, and she was to marry twice more, both times to unsuccessful actors, and those unions were not successes either. All this was for a long time a bar to honors, but in the end she died a Dame and a national treasure.

Artistically, the question is where the Lyceum belongs in the history of

the stage. Was this the last grand fling of Victorian theater? Or did it look forward to the future? Craig, not a man lavish with his praise, revered Irving, both as an actor and for his staging. Irving's repertoire fell almost entirely into two categories: Shakespeare and dross. None of the modern plays that he performed has lasted; he rebuffed the suggestion that he might try Ibsen, and his most famous part, outside Shakespeare, was in a now forgotten melodrama called *The Bells*.

Still, he was also thought to have brought a new and modern quality to his roles.

It was noted that he made Shylock sympathetic; it seems obvious to us that Shylock must be, at least in part, and if this was really Irving's innovation, it was an important one. In *The Bells* he was said to have made the anti-hero understandable in his ordinariness. In a similar vein, Ellen Terry brought her famous charm to Lady Macbeth. Whereas Mrs. Siddons, in the eighteenth century, had given this part a terrifyingly evil grandeur, Ellen Terry made her womanly and affectionate. Her acting, a swooning critic wrote, was "redolent and pungent with the *odeur de femme*. Look how she rushes into her husband's arms, clinging, kissing, coaxing." This makes the trophy-wife idea of the part in the recent West End and Broadway *Macbeth* seem quite prim in comparison.

The difficulty with any history of actors before the twentieth century is that the performances are irretrievably lost. The accounts of Irving's acting are puzzling and conflicting. He did record a bit of *Richard III* on a wax cylinder in the late 1890s, and Holroyd reports that "the thick r's and his *rubato* are very marked." Holroyd also tells us that in 1911 Ellen Terry recorded some speeches and scenes from Shakespeare, of which five survive. It is not clear whether he has heard these; he tells us nothing about them. It seems a curious thing to say about the author of a multi-volume biography of George Bernard Shaw, but Holroyd does not seem all that interested in the theater. What he likes is the narrative of people's lives. The world's longest running soap opera, *The Archers*, which has been on BBC radio for about sixty years, is billed as "an everyday story of country folk." Those who are curious about English theater or Victorian society are likely to be disappointed by Holroyd's book, but those who want *The Terrys and the Irvings*, an everyday story of theatrical folk, will find it just the thing. ♦



The Well-Wishers

LET'S PUT IDEOLOGY aside; that's so yesterday." Those memorable words were uttered by Hillary Clinton in Santo Domingo, on her way to the Summit of the Americas. I wish to parse them. They may be read charitably and uncharitably. I will begin with charity, since in this case it goes against my grain. There are two ways in which the abdication of ideology by the Secretary of State seems understandable. If, by ideology, she means an inflexible and doctrinaire state of mind, so that prior convictions interfere with the elementary exercises in empiricism that must be a foundation of foreign policy, then she is right. We cannot respond properly to what we do not perceive properly. A world misdescribed will be a world mishandled. And if she was referring to the unprecedented agility that is now required by American foreign policy, to the crush of contemporary history, which requires an extraordinary number of practical decisions to be made without the time or the tranquility for reflection, then she also had a point. For a long time now, the conduct of American foreign policy seems to consist mainly in crisis management. The reasons are historical and technological. The world is now curiously uninhibited by our power. It is also, for a "globalized" world, singularly unsynchronized and disordered. The job of American diplomacy is increasingly to catch up with the contingencies. And it is now possible, owing to the wonders of communication and transportation, for American diplomats to be everywhere, or almost everywhere, at the same time, or almost at the same time. This is true also of the journalists who trail them. History has never before been experienced so simultaneously. And so foreign policy is often frantic, and too busy for theory.

HERE ENDS my charity. I do not believe that Clinton was saying anything so reasonable. I think that she was announcing, or rather acknowledging, the demotion of moral analysis, of high

principle, in the articulation of foreign policy by the Obama administration. It appears to be the view of many Democrats that talk about evil is itself evil; that what got us into all our crises abroad was an inordinate infatuation with our values; that there is a correlation between idealism and incompetence. The president is certainly a man of principle, but mainly he is a man of preternatural competence, and we are now going to get things done. I have no quarrel with efficacy, but it is a contentless ideal. The United States needs to be represented in the world by more than best practices. After all, bad ideas can be brilliantly executed. So I am less stirred by implementation than by the reasons for implementation; and our reasons beyond our borders are still somewhat indistinct. We seem to be inventing a new kind of *realpolitik*, distinguished not by toughness but by niceness. As regards certain countries and movements, moreover, the renunciation of an ideological vocabulary has the effect of misrepresenting them. The omission of beliefs from our account of the causes of Iranian, Venezuelan, Cuban, and some Palestinian behavior transgresses precisely against the empiricist imperative: the assertion that states act only on interests is as dogmatic as the assertion that states act only on values. "So yesterday": with this high-school locution Clinton again gave more evidence of her own celebrated pragmatism. A year or so ago she was righteously obliterating Iran! The question of the relation of our principles to our policies cannot be settled by the results of an election, at least not in its substance. Yesterday is not an argument against anything. And there is a wide range of American action between going abroad in search of monsters to destroy and being the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all.

WHEN WE WARM UP to a country, are we warming up to its rulers or to its people? This is the perplexity posed by the new American *abertura*. Is an opening to Ahmadinejad an opening

to the mullahs or to the masses? I fear that Obama's desire to engage the Iranian people will end up engaging only the Iranian leadership. I agree that the nuclear danger justifies such an engagement, at least initially, but the president portrays his approach as something much grander than a policy on proliferation. I understand also that (as a formidable friend at State likes to remind me) it is the ordinary business of diplomats to work with actually existing governments. But that is not the end of the matter. In our enthusiasm not to change regimes, we may strengthen regimes. That, too, is an American intervention. It may be said that the strengthening of a regime that was democratically elected is unobjectionable, but then we avert our eyes from one of the most troublesome paradoxes in the world, which is that undemocratic governments often enjoy democratic legitimacy. The representativeness of a government is not the same as what it represents. A vote democratically cast against democracy is a pseudo-democratic act. Ahmadinejad wins elections, and so does Chávez, and yet the genuinely democratic elements in their societies oppose them, often heroically. It is impossible, therefore, to edify ourselves with Putumayo-like generalities about peoples: when we open up to a government, we give heart to some of its citizens but not to all of them. When Obama, in his Nowruz address, referred to the Islamic Republic of Iran, which is of course its name, I heard people share their delight that an American president finally accepted the Islamic character of the Iranian state. But what of the many Iranians who do not accept the Islamic nature of the Iranian state? I imagine that they felt rather excluded from the ever-expanding circle of Obama's empathy. So we must consider that Obama's sensitivity may be also insensitive. His smooth resort to the Armenian language—"the *Meds Yeghern* must live on in our memories"—in the context of his refusal to call the Armenian genocide a genocide was creepy and insulting. The president seems to care less that America be understood than to show that it understands. But does it, really? It cannot have been a true understanding of the situation in Venezuela that prompted Obama's bounding over to Chávez, smile flashing and handshake forming. Forgive me, but I thought that those who cling to power through corruption and deceit and the silencing of dissent had to unclench their fist *before* we will extend a hand.

LEON WIESELTIER

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